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Impossible Harmonies: Music, Race and Nation in the Neobaroque Novel

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Impossible Harmonies: Music, Race and Nation in the Neobaroque Novel

by

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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2015

Dedication

To Hannah and Emma

Acknowledgments

I am very grateful to everyone who has helped me clarify, sharpen, and expand the ideas presented here. César Salgado, especially, made this project possible. I am thankful for his readership and astonished by his generosity as a mentor.

I would also like to thank the members of my committee: Jennifer Wilks, who introduced me to the writings of James Weldon Johnson, and whose book *Race, Gender, and Comparative Black Modernism* served as a model for me of careful comparative study; Robin Moore, whose *Nationalizing Blackness* shaped my understanding of how race interacts with national culture; Lorraine Leu, who helped me understand my project in the context of larger debates on postcolonialism and culture; and Alan Friedman, who reminded me that the power of my ideas depends on the clarity of my expression and who therefore pushed me to constantly sharpen my writing. I owe special thanks, too, to my former teacher, Lois Parkinson Zamora, who kindled this project when I was a Master's student at the University of Houston, and who has continued to support it through my time in Austin.

Several institutions have supported the development of this dissertation. The Program in Comparative Literature awarded me a Graduate Excellence Fellowship that allowed me to focus exclusively on writing for a year, the Department of Spanish and Portuguese funded my research in Havana in the summer of 2012, and the Fundación Alejo Carpentier welcomed me and provided generous access to papers and resources that proved central to my work. I especially wish to thank Elizabeth Richmond Garza in the Program in Comparative Literature, and Graziella Pogolotti, Rafael Rodrígruez

Beltrán, Yuri Rodríguez González, and Xonia Jiménez López of the Fundación Alejo Carpentier for their help.

I owe thanks to my dad, who loves to find fascinating, unexpected connections and bring them to the attention of the people who he thinks will care most about them. Really, that's what I've been doing in writing this dissertation. I also owe thanks to my friends and colleagues in Comparative Literature, Spanish and Portuguese, and English, and to my family in Austin, Georgetown, Atlanta, Seattle, Lansing, and Tulsa.

Most of all, I want to thank my wife, Hannah. She has lived with this project as long as I have, and I could not have completed it without her extraordinary support and encouragement.

Finally, I want to acknowledge two people who supported this project but passed away before its completion: my grandmother, Jean Grant Walter, a teacher in every sense of the word, who spent countless hours reading to me as a child and took genuine delight in my learning; and my mom, Ann Grant Anthony. Mom was writing her dissertation when she died, and was awarded her PhD posthumously. I've had her diploma with me since, and for all these years it has been both an inspiration and an example to me. While I wish it were hanging on her office wall somewhere, I'm incredibly proud to put mine next to hers.

Impossible Harmonies:

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by

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2015

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"Impossible Harmonies: Music, Race and Nation in the Neobaroque Novel" addresses questions of national identity and the literary uses of music as they apply to the writings of James Weldon Johnson, Alejo Carpentier and Ralph Ellison. I argue that each of these authors uses literary techniques that can be called *neobaroque* to interrogate the notion of harmony as a metaphor for national identity formation. While the idea of the Neobaroque is generally associated with Latin America, I take advantage of critical spaces opened up by recent work on the global Neobaroque to see Baroque traces in other postcolonial areas. And while the Neobaroque is described by Severo Sarduy and Linda Hutcheon as an art of disharmony, I argue instead that as these authors consider nationality from multi-racial perspectives, they work to reproduce the *impossible* harmonies (the phrase comes from a line in Carpentier's 1974 novel, *Concierto barroco*) that dominate African-based music forms in the Americas.

This dissertation addresses continuing controversies in the interpretation of each author's work. Critics, for example, have read Carpentier's preoccupation with form, which is closely connected to his love of music, as a reflection of un-subversive, even elitist tendencies. The charges makes sense: it is hard to reconcile the Beethoven-loving Carpentier who argued that novelists, like musicians, should work within predetermined forms in order to conform to "pressing spiritual needs" with the Carpentier who celebrated the formlessness of Havana's cityscape in "La ciudad de las columnas" ("The City of Columns," 1964). Similarly, Salim Washington argues that Johnson's narrator's quest for a music form that would combine black American music with Western classical music reflects Johnson's assimilationist, "mulatto-based American nationalism." This charge resonates with the central complaint of Robin Moore's *Nationalizing Blackness* (1997): that white Cubans intellectuals and artists, including Carpentier, appropriated black music forms in their construction of a mixed-race national identity. Where Johnson is accused of cultural betrayal, Moore argues that Carpentier participates in a sort of cultural hijacking. Without putting aside those objections, "Impossible Harmonies" recuperates the revolutionary potential of these authors' texts.

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Impossible Harmonies, New World Baroque Theory, and the Blues Matrix

Introduction

In a 1973 article for *El correo de la UNESCO*, Cuban author Alejo Carpentier relates the aftermath of an early seventeenth-century victory by the citizens of Bayamo, led by a black slave named Salvador Golomón, over the French pirate Gilbert Girón. After Golomón beheaded Girón, Carpentier tells us, the people of Bayamo celebrated the triumph with a commemorative hymn and a jubilant musical performance in the town's church:

> The townsfolk brought their guitars and their rebecks, their flutes and fiddles, and held a great ball at which the sound of European instruments mingled with the beat of African drums, maracas and claves, and even some Indian instruments, among them one called a *tipinagua*, which must have resembled the bell-like instruments played by Indians throughout the continent. (44)[1]

Carpentier draws this story from an epic poem, Silvestre de Balboa's *Espejo de paciencia* (*Mirror of Patience*, 1608), which he calls one of Latin America's first important literary

[1] The English translation of "El angel de las maracas" was published in *The Music Educators' Journal* 61.9 (1975): 43-7.

works and "a poem whose hero, for the first time in history, was a Negro, on whom, as the poet put it, all the gods of the Greek mythology looked down in admiration" (44). Carpentier followed recent scholarship: in 1958, Cintio Vitier had analyzed *Espejo de paciencia* in his *Lo cubano en la poesía*, claiming that its hybridizations and the poet's juxtapositions of classical elements with indigenous flora, fauna, musical instruments, and clothes "indica su punto más significativo y dinámico, el que lo vincula realmente con la historia de nuestra poesía" (21). Before him, José Lezama Lima (1954) had marveled over the poem's baroque title, and called the work the beginnings of a literature (38), thus confirming José María Chacón y Calvo's (1921) judgment that the poem was "el primer poema escrito en Cuba."

The poem had been the subject of a number of contentious debates before that. First mentioned in 1837 by members of the abolitionist Del Monte literary circle who claimed to have then lost the manuscript, critics suggested that the poem was a literary hoax or, in Raúl Marrero-Fente's words, "the elaboration of an apocryphal text with ultra-literary ends." In particular, Marrero-Fente explains, "there are doubts about the episode that describes the prominent participation of the slave, Salvador, because it was too close to the abolitionist ideas of Echeverría and his friends" (91). When the existence of the poem was finally verified in 1892 by Néstor Ponce de León, debate shifted to the accuracy of Silvestre de Balboa's account of the incident. Though historic documents verify the existence of several of the event's participants and the kidnapping of Bishop Fray Juan de las Cabezas Altamirano, they also indicate that Balboa, along with many of the townspeople of Bayamo, was charged with smuggling contraband and that Balboa had lost his position as a notary due to the accusations (Marrero-Fente 85-9). Marrero-

Fente cites Manuel Moreno Fraginals, who writes, "So many [townspeople] were the defendants that it was impossible to imprison them due to a lack of space in the town, and the embraced solution was to make of the city their prison" (88). In this light, Balboa looks less a patriotic chronicler of the incident—"fired by poetic inspiration," as Carpentier put it—than a propagandist, fashioning a narrative might win him pardon or, at least, restore his reputation.

Carpentier seems to have taken Balboa's poem as fact, though his interest lay in a slightly different direction than either Vitier's or Lezama Lima's. Carpentier mentioned the Bayamo incident in his text on the island's musical history, *La música en Cuba* (*Music in Cuba*, 1946) and then again in his novel *Concierto barroco* (1974). In both, as in "El ángel de las maracas," what draws the author's attention is less the battle than the musical event that takes place after it, which Carpentier says heralds the unique mixing of cultural elements that will come to characterize Cuban music and, by extension, Cuban culture. In *Concierto barroco*, the black character Filomeno, claiming to be a descendant of Golomón, tells his master of the battle and its celebration. When Filomeno begins to tell of the concert, the Master interrupts. "Whites and blacks all mixed up in revelry like that?" he says. "An impossible harmony!"

For Carpentier, this "impossible harmony" represents more than just a starting point for Cuban music and culture; it emblematizes the interplay of cultures and powers in the New World. New World Baroque theory builds on this cultural interplay, finding a subversive function for Baroque aesthetics in the Americas: according to this theory, suppressed cultures take advantage of elements of the Baroque: its emphasis on hybridity, proliferation and contrast, for example—to create space for cultural survival and even

critique of the dominant culture. Lezama Lima, Carpentier's contemporary, formulated the process most clearly, declaring that in Latin America the art of the counter-reformation became an art of counter-conquest. Along with fellow Cuban Severo Sarduy, the three noted the perseverance of New World Baroque strategies in twentieth-century artistic expression—expression that Sarduy would term "neobaroque" in his 1972 essay "El barroco y el neobarroco" ("The Baroque and the Neobaroque").

Impossible Harmonies explores the ways Carpentier, James Weldon Johnson, and Ralph Ellison used music in their fiction to work through issues of racial and national identity. Each was tied to the world of music; each produced what I call "musical fiction." "Musical fiction" is a tricky term, one that will have to remain somewhat loosely defined in this study, since each of these authors incorporated music into his fiction in different ways. Carpentier repeatedly hinted, and sometimes explicitly claimed that, like James Joyce, he attempted to transpose musical forms into his novels. Ellison insisted that in order to write *Invisible Man*, he had to "improvise upon my materials in the manner of a jazz musician putting a musical theme through a wild star-burst of metamorphosis" ("Introduction" xxi). Johnson wrote before Carpentier and Ellison and, while his work certainly can be called modernist, he wrote *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* without the sort of formal experimentation that would dominate the "high modernist" phase of the 1920s and 1930s and set the tone for Carpentier's and Ellison's writing. Nonetheless, *The Autobiography* is a strikingly musical text, as well, as is all of Johnson's writing: as Brent Hayes Edwards observes, Johnson often uses music as a metaphor both for his compositional process and for racial and national identity ("The Seemingly Eclipsed Window of Form" 588).

Carpentier and Ellison do the same, and all three treat music as a stand-in for culture, both racial and national. So "music as metaphor" will serve as a common denominator for this investigation. Of course, "musical fiction" can mean much more than just "music as metaphor," and the complicated transpositions Carpentier and Ellison worked into their texts reveal more precisely the meanings of the metaphor operating in their fiction. But by beginning with a metaphorical understanding of musical fiction, I hope to avoid, or at least be prepared to address, some of the common risks that tend to befall studies of music in the novel.

Emil Volek makes these risks clear in his response to Eduard Hodousek's reading of Carpentier's *El reino de este mundo*, in which Hodousek claims that the structure of the novel echoes rhapsody form. Volek finds Hodousek's argument too dependent on "vague impressions" and poetic comparisons that "can neither be affirmed nor denied" (149-50). Volek cites René Wellek, who writes, "Literary imitations of musical structures like leitmotiv, the sonata, or symphonic form seem to be more concrete; but it is hard to see why repetitive motifs, or a certain contrasting and balancing of mood, though by avowed intention imitation of musical composition, are not essentially the familiar literary devices of recurrence, contrast, and the like which are common to all the arts" (127). In this charge, I think these two critics miss the point: these literary devices may exist across the arts, but they occur in different frequencies and in different contexts depending on the medium. By manipulating the frequency and the context of these devices, Carpentier, Ellison, and (to a lesser extent) Johnson change the way they are received by readers. Wellek and Volek are correct though, in that any investigation across the arts will necessarily extend into the realm of metaphor. And while I think that remains

a valid realm of investigation, especially for artists (like Johnson, Carpentier, and Ellison) who frequently and explicitly sought to find parallels between and among the arts, it is worthwhile to understand our limitations at the outset of our study.[2]

Volek also worries that studies like Hodousek's "translate the meaning of the work to the plain of pure aesthetics" (149). Of this charge, at least, this investigation is innocent: one thing that Carpentier, Ellison, and Johnson have in common is their insistence on the political meaning of music. Writing about African American folk stories, the "cake-walk," and music, Johnson argued, "These three achievements are the greatest proof which the race has yet brought against the common charge of inferiority, because they are not the work of one or two gifted individuals but of the race as a whole. … And that is proof of inherent power" ("American Music" 287). Ellison described jazz as a model for US democracy ("Going to the Territory" 602-3), and Carpentier praised Afro-Cuban music as "una prueba más de la vitalidad de nuestra raza americana" ("No es afición"). The relationship between musical composition and these authors' fiction may be based in metaphor, but for all three the metaphor matters greatly.

Metaphor also leads us into continuing controversies in the interpretation of each author's work. Critics have read Carpentier's preoccupation with form, which is closely connected to his love of music, for example, as a reflection of conservative, even elitist tendencies. The charges make sense: it is hard to reconcile the Beethoven-loving Carpentier who argued that novelists, like musicians, should work within predetermined

[2] Some of Volek's criticisms of Hodousek are specific to his analysis of *El reino de este mundo*. Volek points out, for example, that while Carpentier claimed a musical structure for *El acoso* (examined in our Chapter 2) and "Viaje a la semilla," he never did for *El reino de este mundo*. Of course, that does not prove that a musical structure is not at work in the novel, and Carpentier stressed the presence of music in all of his work (Leante 26).

forms in order to conform to "pressing spiritual needs" with the Carpentier who celebrated the formlessness of Havana's cityscape in "La ciudad de las columnas" (1964). Similarly, Salim Washington argues that Johnson's narrator's quest for a music form that would combine black American music with Western classical music reflects Johnson's assimilationist, "mulatto-based American nationalism" (233). This charge resonates with the central complaint of Robin Moore's *Nationalizing Blackness* (1997): that white Cubans, including Carpentier, appropriated black musical forms in their construction of a mixed-race national identity. Where Johnson is accused of cultural betrayal, Moore argues that Carpentier participates in a sort of cultural hijacking.

In a larger sense, the goal of merging cultures through music, of harmonizing, seems contrary to the impulse of the Neobaroque, which Sarduy calls an art of disharmony ("Baroque and Neobaroque" 289). But I propose that neobaroque musical fiction produces neither disharmony nor cultural harmony, at least not in the sense of simple agreement between dominant and suppressed voices. Instead, it creates fictional harmonies, fictional agreements that parallel the fictional sameness that César A. Salgado says characterizes New World Baroque responses to European cultural dominance.[3] Salgado's term is especially felicitous in that it evokes both a false sameness, a false agreement with official culture that disguises subversion, and a tendency to turn to writing fiction as a means of synthesizing the inassimilable. Fiction, after all, is the ultimate recourse of *Invisible Man*'s narrator: after watching his society explode in a riot, he disappears underground and then emerges with a narrative that somehow comprehends

[3] Salgado writes that, in the New World, the Baroque technique of hybridity serves as "a hidden inscription of difference within the fictional sameness of official culture, a rebellious graffiti camouflaged in the forest of baroque symbols" (15).

all of the "uncertain extremes of the scale" (Spaulding 496). As we will see, the *impossible* harmonies in all three of these authors' works reflect irreconcilable cultural contradictions and unresolvable tensions—while cohering, the harmonies undo themselves. And these impossible harmonies are especially apparent when Johnson, Carpentier, and Ellison write about, or with, music.

This becomes clearer when we read Carpentier and Johnson alongside Ellison and James Joyce, an influence Carpentier and Ellison share. But whereas the former two are criticized for subsuming black cultural expressions into white forms, critics have treated the politics of the latter two more positively. In particular, the criticism of Joyce (who will play a significant part in Chapter 2 of this study) has moved in the opposite direction to that of Carpentier: once seen as a consummate aesthetic modernist, Joyce has more recently been read (by Enda Duffy, Emer Nolan, and Vincent Cheng, among others) as a political subversive. For Duffy and Nolan, Joyce's political engagement takes the form of Irish nationalism, while Cheng and David Lloyd find *anti*-nationalist currents in Joyce's politics. Lloyd's book *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Postcolonial Moment* offers a useful tool for understanding Joyce's sense of the nation, and consequently those of Carpentier, Johnson, and Ellison. Cheng characterizes Lloyd's argument as a "postcolonial as well as poststructuralist deconstruction of authenticity/identity as discursively constructed, fragmented, and ultimately hybrid" (83). Lloyd's analysis, in other words, is strikingly neobaroque.

Impossible Harmonies does not seek to dispel all critical reservations to Carpentier and Johnson's revolutionary status, or to paint an untroubled portrait of any of these authors as champions of the downtrodden. Pablo Neruda called Carpentier "one of

the most uncommitted men I have ever known," and Roberto González Echevarría suggested that the Cuban's self-cultivated image as revolutionary "did not correspond with the facts" (*Cartas*, 16). Similarly, Johnson comes off as an elitist in his *New York Age* editorials, which adopt white cultural standards that devalue black contributions.[4] But my focus is on the undercurrents and tensions in each author's very complex fictions. I ask my readers to consider the ways these authors worked against themselves, sometimes consciously and sometimes not; the ways their nationalist constructions sowed the seeds for undoing nationalism; and the ways their blending of races and cultures worked to undermine the harmonious blending of race and culture.

By reading Johnson and Ellison as neobaroque authors, *Impossible Harmonies* expands on recent work by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup, who have been central to the re-emergence in recent years of New World Baroque theory as an alternative to postcolonial analyses of power and subalterity.[5] Some important signposts in that re-emergence include Zamora's *The Inordinate Eye* (2006), the 2009 *PMLA* special issue on the Neobaroque in the Americas, edited by Patricia Yaeger, and the 2010 book Zamora and Kaup co-edited, *Baroque New Worlds.*

Zamora and Kaup, writing on the "Latin American" or the "New World" Baroque, make full use of those terms, pushing them beyond their conventional limits. *Baroque New Worlds* includes, for example, an essay on baroque self-fashioning in

[4] Washington finds these editorials to be "in harmony" with Johnson's fiction, a view I aim to complicate.

[5] For a summary and analysis of the debates on the applicability of postcolonial theory to the Latin American situation, see "Colonialism and its Replicants," by Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui, in *Coloniality at Large* (2008). The authors ultimately argue for the usefulness of postcolonial theory in analyzing Latin America's history of coloniality, but emphasize that the region has produced its own theories (including New World Baroque theory) to interpret that history, as well.

seventeenth century French Canada, which Zamora rightly maintains, "forms a part of Latinate America, if not Latin America as we now use the term" (23). And by emphasizing the ways that Latin American Baroque expression spreads outside of Latin America's geographical borders, Kaup is able to write about Detroit-made Cadillacs becoming neobaroque cathedrals in the hands of Mexican-Americans in California, and to re-envision Gaudí's neo-gothic buildings in Barcelona as another form of neobaroque.[6]

In contemporary criticism, then, New World Baroque theory is being used to read texts from a variety of cultures. Thus Yaeger writes that scholars working outside of Latin America "need to toy with the neobaroque" (14).[7] But while Zamora, Kaup, and others extend the reach of the New World Baroque, they do so carefully and within reason for, as Zamora notes, "the real strength of the neobaroque resides in its engagement of specific historical and cultural contexts, and in this aspect it departs radically from most academic postcolonialisms" ("New World Baroque, Neobaroque, Brut Barroco," 130).

Impossible Harmonies fits within that framework by emphasizing the cultural specifics that Carpentier, Johnson, and Ellison share, and the ways these specifics echo those that gave rise to the New World Baroque as delineated by Carpentier and Lezama Lima. This is readily apparent in Johnson's work. A native of Florida, Johnson grew up

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[6] See, for example, Kaup's book *Neobaroque in the Americas: Alternative Modernities in Literature, Visual Art and Film* (Virginia UP).

[7] For her part, Yaeger calls Eudora Welty a "consummate practitioner of the neobaroque" (12). Recent studies have read Italo Calvino (Wright, 1998) and Flannery O'Connor (Bosco, 2009) as baroque or neobaroque artists, and Angela Ndalianis' book *Neo-baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment* (2005) has traced the Neobaroque into Hollywood films, video games, and comic books. María Isabel Acosta Cruz broached the question of Joyce's *neobarroquismo* in her 1984 dissertation "The Discourse of Excess: The Latin American Neobaroque and James Joyce."

among Cuban-Americans and was fluent in Spanish. He served in US consuls in Nicaragua and Venezuela, where he wrote the bulk of his novel. So I think we can talk about neobaroque elements in these authors without falling into what Jorge Klor de Alva calls a regrettable blindness to the cultural specificity of the Latin American colonial situation.

What is a Neobaroque Novel?

New World Baroque Theory, with its development of the concept of the Neobaroque, offers an especially useful lens for bringing these authors together conceptually. In choosing this lens, I realize that I am necessarily foregoing other lenses, ones that might seem, at first glance, to make for easier comparison. I could, for example, situate all three authors' works along a modern/postmodern axis, borrowing Linda Hutcheon's notion of the postmodern as a "self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement" that can be politicized to critique a hegemonic notion of ultimate truth (*Politics* 1). Or, given each author's relative situation vis-à-vis hegemonic power (whether it be US imperialism for Carpentier, British colonialism for Joyce, or the doctrine of white supremacy for Johnson and Ellison), we could explore their writings through the lens of postcolonial theory. And to a certain extent I will do both—especially keeping in mind Hutcheon's idea of the role of parody in postmodern expression and Homi Bhabha's writings on hybridity as a decolonizing discourse.[8]

[8] Hybridity's usefulness as a tool for decolonization has been challenged by what Jan Nederveen Pieterse calls an "anti-hybridity backlash" (221). Jonathan Friedman (1997) and R.C. Young (1995), for example, have argued that privileging hybridity fails to

But despite the diversity of these authors' situations and output, I think we can be more precise. There are too many cultural specifics, too many shared influences between and among these authors to *just* talk about them as modern or postmodern or postcolonial writers. There's the marked influence of Joyce, for example, on both Carpentier and Ellison; there's the importance of Latin America to the racial notions of Johnson; and the under-explored impact of African American cultural expression on Carpentier. There's the Catholicism that shaped both Joyce and Carpentier and the Americanism that Johnson, Ellison, and Carpentier each uniquely expressed. And, of course, all three were musicians and music lovers trying to infuse their writing with the sounds that animated their passions. Describing these authors as "neobaroque" ties them together through a specific set of shared techniques—techniques with political consequences—that allow us an entryway through which to start talking about their works as postcolonial or modern. In other words, *neobarroquismo* may be thought of as the way these texts are postcolonial or modern.

So what makes a novel neobaroque? We can start with the techniques that Sarduy attributes to the Baroque: *condensation, proliferation,* and *substitution*. Of substitution, Sarduy writes, "When in *Paradiso* José Lezama Lima calls a male organ 'the stinger of the leptosomatic macrogenitome,' Baroque artifice manifests itself through a substitution that we could describe on the level of the sign: the signifier corresponding to the signified 'virility' has been purloined and replaced by another, totally removed from it semiotically and functioning only in the erotic context of the story" (270). He notes that in twentieth-

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challenge hegemonic power structures and may, in fact, reinforce those structures. These critiques parallel those leveled against Carpentier, Johnson, and Ellison. For a summary of the larger debate on hybridity, see Nederveen Pieterse's article "Hybridity, So What?" (2001).

century Latin American literature, authors have "preserved and at times widened the distance between the two terms of the sign [signifier and signified] that constitutes the essence of their language" (271). The Neobaroque, in other words, intensified this Baroque tendency.

Sarduy continues the semiotic language in his description of proliferation, which he notes is not just the simple accumulation of descriptors but, instead, "obliterating the signifier of a given signified without replacing it with another, however distant the latter might be from the former, but rather by a chain of signifiers that progresses metonymically and that ends by circumscribing the absent signifier, tracing an orbit around it, an orbit whose reading—which we would call a radial reading—enables us to infer it" (273). Finally, Sarduy describes condensation as a technique that consists of "interchange among elements—phonetic, visual, and so on—of two of the terms of a signifying chain, collision and condensation, from which emerges a third term that summarizes the first two semantically" (277).

As Acosta Cruz notes, a neobaroque novel need not contain all three techniques, and it may rely more heavily on one than on the others. And Sarduy lists other techniques that tend to appear in the Baroque and the Neobaroque: notably parody, with emphasis on intertextuality and intratextuality, and eroticism, with the erotic especially characterized as wasteful: " Baroque space is superabundant and wasteful," he insists. And, later, "The inevitable exclamation to which a chapel by Churriguera or Aleijadinho, a verse by Góngora or Lezama, or any other Baroque act gives rise, whether it belongs to the art of painting or pastry making, is 'So much work!' an exclamation that implies the barely concealed adjective, so much *wasted* work!" (288).

Sarduy also finds a revolutionary potential in these aesthetics:

> If the Baroque game has zero usefulness, this is not true of its structure. The latter is no mere arbitrary and gratuitous appearance, no pointless structure that expresses only itself; on the contrary, it is a reductive reflection of what envelops and transcends it; a reflection that repeats its attempt—to be at once totalizing and meticulously detailed. But, like the mirror centering and restating Van Eyck's portrait of the Arnolfinis, or the Gongorine mirror, 'faithful though concave,' Baroque structure does not succeed in capturing the vastness of the language that circumscribes it, the organization of the universe: there is something that resists it, opposes it with its opacity, refuses its image. (289)

The Neobaroque, Sarduy argues, is not just a contemporary revival of baroque concepts, nor a mere intensification of them, but instead a self-conscious exaggeration of those concepts, one that highlights and revels in the Baroque's failure to create a totalizing system. In doing so, the Neobaroque becomes, in Sarduy's words, an "art of dethronement and dispute."

The Neobaroque and Musical Fiction

According to Houston A. Baker, another art of dethronement and dispute comes from African American expression built on what he calls the "blues matrix." The blues, Baker argues, is black America's vernacular, its response to centuries of white supremacist history. For Baker, vernacular, or nonstandard language, is a key notion, and

studying the differences between African American expression and "standard" white expression is a useful way to understand black self-fashioning and resistance to assumptions of white supremacy.

The blues, Baker writes, is "the 'always already' of Afro-American culture," and "the multiplex, enabling *script* in which Afro-American cultural discourse is inscribed" (4). Albert Murray goes a step further, arguing that the blues forms the paradigm for all US cultural expression. The blues, he writes, is a national phenomenon, though not in the sense of "flag-waving, chauvinism, and Fourth of July jingoism." Instead, he argues, "What makes it ancestral is a longtime underlying assumption that there are traits that are basic to and definitive of [North] American character and thus a uniquely American outlook or attitude towards experience that makes for a native value system and lifestyle" (77).

Baker also describes the blues as a "veritable playful festival of meaning" (5) and "a relational matrix where *difference* is the law" (6). As with Sarduy's definition of the Neobaroque, Baker's notion of the blues starts from the Saussurean distinction between signifier and signified. He calls the blues "a 'negative symbol' that generates (or obliges one to invent) its own referents" (9). The signified serves in Baker's blues matrix much the same role that an occluded or absent center does in Sarduy's Neobaroque. Two of the authors in this study can be assimilated into Baker's blues-based discourse without controversy: Baker holds Ellison up as one of the paradigms of twentieth-century blues literature, and (elsewhere) he writes of Johnson's *Autobiography* as a "forgotten prototype" for Ellison's *Invisible Man*. But I propose that African American music can help us read Carpentier as well.

While Baker calls blues the "always already" of African American culture, Christopher Winks writes that "the manifestation of an African presence in literature, inherently disruptive to the pretensions of official colonial (and postcolonial) US literary culture, can indeed be said to be *always already Baroque*" (600, my emphasis). Reconciling these two readings—finding the Baroque in African American expression and African American expression in the Baroque—will be a significant part of this project, in which I hope to connect these disparate authors.

Sarduy's Neobaroque Blues

But rather than beginning with any of them, I want to first look back to Sarduy. Sarduy's theoretical outline of the Neobaroque comes in two texts: the essay "Baroque and Neobaroque" (1972) and his book *Barroco* (1974). Between those two, Sarduy published a book of poems, "Big Bang" (1973). The second section of that book turns the title into a pun on the phrase "big band"; it's titled "Mood Indigo," after a Duke Ellington composition. In "Mood Indigo," Sarduy explicitly and repeatedly links the Latin American Neobaroque to North American jazz.

The section sandwiches two titled poems, "Orquestica tántrica" and "Espiral negra" inside two untitled ones. "Orquestica tántrica," which lists members of Ellington's orchestra and their instruments like liner notes on a record, highlights both the emphasis on waste and erotic play that Sarduy says characterize the Neobaroque: "Joe Nanton on the trombone: to get a good Wah-Wah / piss in the copper mouth," for example, and "Johnny Hodges on the alto sax: a great [lick], yes sir. Who if not him/would be able to

expel from the mouth the air breathed from the asshole?"[9] As the poem continues, Sarduy links dated images of Dixieland jazz ("barcos de rueda—la orquesta a bordo" 38) with baroque aesthetics ("otra vez fetiche/de tan sofisticada/tan de oro y dobles arabescos/de piedras y plumas incrustada" 37). By linking the Mississippi River and the Nile, Sarduy evokes Langston Hughes' "The Negro Speaks of Rivers."

"Espiral negra," in turn, builds on a paradigmatic baroque image: the spiral. A concrete poem printed in an actual spiral, the poem starts (or ends, depending on how one reads it) "del centro negro" and unspools through the diasporic centers of black culture in Europe and the Americas, finally cycling through the most famous jazz clubs in Paris and New York before ending with the image of Piet Mondrian dancing the boogie-woogie. Perla Rozencvaig describes the poem thus:

> 'Del centro negro' hacia afuera en una lectura inspirada en la fuerza centrífuga, nos trasladamos a la América representada por Nueva Orleans y la Habana. El Africa reafirma su presencia 'del Congo a Virginia,' 'de la Costa de Oro a Nueva Orleans' mediante la fusión de ambos continentes. El elemento indio 'flechas rojas minúsculas' aparece solapado, pero más solapado aún se presenta la raíz hispánica en el nuevo mundo: 'wasn't dat a wide ribber.' (40)

In all of these ways, Sarduy finds the Baroque in North American jazz—or perhaps more precisely, the jazz in the New World Baroque. As Rolando Pérez writes, "The African American experience: slavery, and the consequent American (artistic) expression vis-à-vis jazz, is tantamount to the United States' 'contrapunteo neobarroco,' or neo-Baroque

[9] My translation.

counterpoint. That is why Sarduy can juxtapose 'el templo de Ochún' with the 'Ecos of Harlem rayado' and write later: 'con Cootie Williams a la trompeta / y Duke al piano / en la madera de las claves / han dejado escrituras yorubas…'" (193).

Reconciling Sarduy and Carpentier: Glissant

One objection that presents itself here involves the different conceptions of the Baroque in the New World suggested by Sarduy and Carpentier, and the complications that seem to arise from using one's writings to explicate the other. As Lois Zamora and Monika Kaup write in *Baroque New Worlds*, the two authors were frequently at odds in their understanding of the Baroque; Sarduy went so far as to insist to Emir Rodríguez Monegal that "Carpentier is neo-Gothic, which is not the same as baroque" (*El arte de narrar* 287).[10] In Zamora and Kaup's formulation, the dispute between the two boils down to a question on the role of nature in baroque expression: for Carpentier, the Baroque was the art of nature; for Sarduy, artifice was its essential characteristic.

In answer to this objection I offer two responses. First, I explore in Chapter 2, I suggest that Carpentier's and Sarduy's conception of the New World Baroque actually converged in Carpentier's last works, especially *Concierto barroco*, which, I argue, reflects both Sarduy's criticism and the influence of *Big Bang*. But I also think it will be helpful here to look at the example of another Caribbean writer, Édouard Glissant, who considered himself a Baroque artist and who, at the same time, recognized the many close connections that writers, artists, and musicians in Caribbean could share with blacks in

[10] "Carpentier es un neogótico, que no es lo mismo que un barroco."

the United States. In doing so, we will not only bridge the divide between Sarduy and Carpentier; we will also begin to see how that bridge opens connections between and among Carpentier, Johnson, and Ellison.

We can draw several parallels between Glissant and Carpentier, at least in terms of their conceptions of their Caribbean literary projects. In interviews and essays, Glissant often quick drew these comparisons himself, frequently invoking Carpentier as an example of the conceptions of *antillanité* and creolization that he helped develop. In the following passage, for example, Glissant analogizes his own writing with the Cuban's:

> Un Alejo Carpentier (Cuba), qui écrit en espagnol, un Wilson Harris (Guyana) qui, lui, écrit en anglais, un Aimé Césaire (Martinique) ou moi-même, qui écrivons en français, avons un langage commun qui est fait de confiance dans les mots, dans le pouvoir du verbe, dans les techniques d'écriture que nous avons empruntées essentiellement à Faulkner: accumulation, listage, redondances, entassements, revelations différées. Tout cela constitue un langage, une manie[b']re de s'approprier les langues que nous avons tous en comun. Cela constitue une donnée littéraire spécifique, une esthétique de la relation, si vous voulez. ("La 'créolisation'")

The "aesthetic of relation" that Glissant cites there, along with the list of specific techniques he claimed Carpentier borrowed from Faulkner ("accumulation, listage, redondances, entassements, revelations différées") highlights an important comparison we can make between the two: both Glissant and Carpentier considered themselves

Baroque writers, and they defined the New World Baroque in similar ways—not only in terms of proliferation/abundance and hybridities, but also in terms of instability, verbal play, and what Sarduy would call ellipsis, but Glissant calls "revelations différées". Glissant's conception of the meanings and uses of the Baroque in the New World is most clearly elaborated in his essay "Concerning a Baroque Abroad in the World," from *Poetics of Relation* (1990). In that essay, he does not abandon the notions of antillanité/creolité that have dominated Francophone Caribbean studies for decades; instead, he names those processes as baroque, in the process blending Lezama's, Carpentier's, and Sarduy's understandings of the New World Baroque—understandings frequently at odds with each other—into a tense hybrid.

A key point of contention between Carpentier and Sarduy concerns the Baroque's relation to nature. Carpentier, following d'Ors, sees the Baroque as based in nature, while Sarduy argues that it is "the apotheosis of artifice, the irony and mockery of nature" ("Baroque and Neobaroque," 272). Glissant triangulates between them, writing that the Baroque impulse started as a reaction against nature before the "new" reality of the New World forced a new understanding of nature. He writes:

> The first account of this was the Latin American religious art, so close to Iberian or Flemish Baroque but so closely intermingled with autochthonous tones boldly introduced into the Baroque concert. These elements do not occur as innovations in the representation of reality but as novel bits of information concerning a nature that was definitely 'new.' Baroque art ceased its adversarial role; it established an innovative vision (soon a different conception) of Nature and acted in keeping with it. (625)

This passage, of course, reformulates Carpentier's theory of the Marvelous Real, and it connects the Marvelous Real to the New World Baroque even more thoroughly than Carpentier himself did. With his reference to the "autochthonous tones boldly introduced into the Baroque concert," Glissant also recalls the Bayamo anecdote with which I started this study and which Carpentier included in *Concierto barroco*. More generally, the passage underscores the extent to which Glissant builds from Carpentier. Carpentier writes that "all symbiosis, all *mestizaje*, engenders the baroque" ("Baroque and the Marvelous Real," 100); Glissant, in turn, writes that the Baroque "reached its high point in *métissage*" (625). Carpentier writes of the Baroque projecting itself forward ("Baroque and the Marvelous Real," 98), and Glissant echoes him, describing the baroque will as "hurtled" through its "vertiginous styles, languages and cultures" (625).

This is an important point, since the Francophone tradition from which Glissant writes is very different from the Hispanophone tradition with which the New World Baroque is normally associated. Notably, the Francophone tradition is sometimes considered disconnected, if not outright hostile, to baroque aesthetics. No doubt Glissant notices Carpentier's tendency to speak in hemispheric terms and his pointed inclusion of Haitian examples in his writings on "American" nature. In a sense, Glissant draws out and emphasizes Carpentier's (metaphoric) French accent.

He also emphasizes the Cuban author's cosmopolitanism, his inability to stay—physically or theoretically—in Cuba. Indeed, the title of Glissant's essay, "Concerning a Baroque Abroad in the World," underscores that for Glissant, as for Carpentier, the Baroque is a force of expression that spreads over national and regional boundaries, both consuming/cannibalizing alien styles and infiltrating them, and taking advantage of

unexpected points of contact to appear in unexpected places. "The generalization of *métissage*," Glissant writes, "was all that the Baroque needed to become naturalized. From then on what it expressed in the world was the proliferating contact of diversified natures" (625).

Glissant's construction of a cosmopolitan, French Carpentier has consequences: most intriguingly, it opens readings of Carpentier to fields of contact that might not seem apparent from cursory readings of his work. I've cited Glissant's insistence that Carpentier borrowed from Faulkner; as Celia Britton and Martin Munro point out, this is a "contentious" assertion (12). But it begins to make sense if we see Faulkner as a participant in the same African American-centered US culture that produced the music Carpentier was experimenting with in the 1920s and 30s. This is certainly the way Glissant read Faulkner, as he chronicles in his 1995 book *Faulkner, Mississippi*. Nor is Glissant alone in this: as Albert Murray reminds us, "Much of what Faulkner writes not only includes blues idiom, wit, and wisdom: in some instances it also appears to be conscious extensions of Negro folklore" (180).

Interestingly, in "Concerning a Baroque Abroad in the World," Glissant also defines the New World Baroque in musical terms that recall Carpentier's "impossible harmonies," as he writes that the Baroque approach to knowledge is "a stubborn renouncement of any ambition to summarize the world's matter in sets of imitative harmonies that would approach some essence," contrasting that renouncement with the classical idea of nature as "harmonious, homogenous, and thoroughly knowable" (624). It comes as no surprise, then, that jazz is the specific music form with which Glissant most completely identifies his own writing. In a 2007 interview, Glissant claimed that "Mon

style d'écriture est le style de jazz de Miles Davis" (Tamby 148). Jean-Luc Tamby offers a complex, impressive analysis of what, precisely, this comment *means*; but for the purposes of this study it's enough to note that many of the characteristics (*deferment*, a "*vertige des styles"*) and images/symbols (especially the spiral) that Davis and Glissant share are often associated with the Baroque.

From Blues to the *Son*: The Jazz Matrix

Moving from Baker's blues matrix to the novels of Carpentier and Joyce presents other difficulties, not the least of which is Baker's insistence on the cultural specificity of the blues. For Baker the blues, the expressive form of black America, arose from the unique circumstances of US slavery and the country's post-Reconstruction Jim Crow history. While Baker recognizes the blues' "myriad corridors, mainroads, and way-stations," (4) he stops short of tracking any of those corridors into (or out of) other postcolonial sites, such as Latin America or Joyce's Ireland.

In response, I propose that we consider the novelists I examine here through what I'm calling a "jazz matrix." This terminological shift internationalizes African American expression without, I hope, doing too much violence to Baker's readings of Johnson and Ellison. After all, by making the blues into a "matrix"—in fact, one that predates the development of the blues as a specific musical phenomenon—Baker has already moved it away from its specific, concrete meaning as a musical form. And while we think of blues and jazz as separate musical genres today, historically they are much more difficult to distinguish. Indeed, for a long stretch of America's musical history—from advent of both

the blues and jazz at the turn of the twentieth century through the 1920s and 1930s—the terms "jazz" and "blues" were virtually interchangeable. At that time, the typical jazz repertoire consisted almost entirely of songs based on typical blues arrangements, and the artists known as the epitome of "Classic blues," such as Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey, performed and recorded with the artists known as the fathers of jazz, such as Louis Armstrong and W.C. Handy. Jelly Roll Morton considered himself the father of the blues; Ellison calls him the father of jazz. Similarly, Handy titled his memoirs *Father of the Blues*, but he is more often remembered as a jazz artist.

Though it's more or less forgotten today, this terminological slipperiness persists in Ellison, Murray, and Baker's writings on music. In a 1961 interview, for example, Ellison describes growing up in what can be characterized as a jazz matrix. He says:

> You see, jazz was so much a part of our total way of life that it got not only into our attempts at playing classical music but into forms of activities usually not associated with it: into marching band and into football games, where it has since become a familiar fixture. A lot has been written about the role of jazz in a certain type of Negro funeral marching, but in Oklahoma City it got into military drill. There were many Negro veterans from the Spanish-American War who delighted in teaching the young boys complicated drill patterns… And as we mastered the patterns, the jazz feeling would come into it and no one was satisfied until we were swinging. These men who taught us had raised a military discipline to the level of a low art form, almost a dance, and its spirit was jazz. (69-70)

Ellison's essays make clear that this "spirit" was very close to the blues spirit that Murray and Baker say characterizes the best of US literature.

It's important, in making this shift, to understand why Baker and Murray chose the term "blues" over "jazz" in the first place. In part, their reasoning can be found in Baker's notion of the blues as the "always already" of black culture. For Baker, as for Murray, the blues is the originary African American music form, and jazz is a branch of this purer trunk. This notion is very much wrapped up with the idea of blues as a rural form that developed uncorrupted over centuries before it was corrupted on its arrival in American cities. To illustrate the primordial nature of the blues, Baker repeats a story told by Handy in *Father of the Blues* (1941):

> At a railroad junction deep in the Southern night, Handy dozed restlessly as he awaited the arrival of a much-delayed train. A guitar's bottleneck resonance suddenly jolted him to consciousness, as a lean, loose-jointed shabbily clad black man sang:
>
> Goin' where the Southern cross the Dog.
>
> Goin' where the Southern cross the Dog.
>
> Goin' where the Southern cross the Dog.

As Marybeth Hamilton points out in "Sexuality, Authenticity, and the Making of Blues Tradition" (2000), Handy's famous story of discovering the blues in a Mississippi train station became a sort of originary myth for the music. But it is not necessarily the *true* origin of the blues: Hamilton proposes a different "father," Morton, and a different birthplace, the brothels of New Orleans, rather than the fields of Mississippi. As Hamilton records, Morton also told a story of the first time he heard the music, claiming

that it came from a Storyville singer, pianist, and prostitute named Mamie Desdoumes. This is a significant shift: it means seeing the blues as music made as much by women as by men, urban rather than strictly rural, cosmopolitan rather than isolated, and connected to ragtime and jazz rather than separate from them.

It also means acknowledging the "Spanish tinge" that Morton claimed was essential to black music in the US, and which is inextricable from New Orleans' musical heritage. A number of scholars have explored what, exactly, the "Spanish tinge" means in musical terms. Christopher Washburne, for example, has described "a Caribbean contribution to the rhythmic foundation of jazz" (59). And both North American and Cuban scholars (including Carpentier) have found significance in the fact that the first major blues hit, Handy's "St. Louis Blues," has a *habanera* rhythm. Further, Leonardo Acosta's in-depth study of jazz in Cuba, *Cubano Be, Cubano Bop*, outlines just how these influences emerged among the multitude of links between Cuban and North American musicians (especially in New Orleans).

This dissertation aims to take Acosta and Washburne's observations and apply them to literature. Is there a Spanish tinge in the writings of Ellison and Johnson? Conversely, is there a black center in the writings of Carpentier?

Passing, Camouflage, and the Jazz Ethic of Subversion

Salgado writes that, in the Neobaroque, hybridity serves as "a hidden inscription of difference within the fictional sameness of official culture, a rebellious graffiti camouflaged in the forest of baroque symbols" (15). Through this camouflage, the

Neobaroque text enacts its counter-conquest. We can break the technique, then, into two steps: camouflage—or "passing" as official/standard—and subversion. For Ralph Ellison, jazz performs the same functions: it's an "art of individual assertion within [camouflage] and against [subversion] the group" ("The Charlie Christian Story" 267). This dissertation will assert that in this dual function—passing and subversion—the Jazz Neobaroque finds its revolutionary potential.

The theme of passing recurs throughout the work of Johnson, Carpentier, and Ellison—as well as that of Joyce, who heavily influenced the latter two. Johnson's novel, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*, is a comprehensive exploration of what it means to pass as both white and black. But Joyce's *Ulysses* also deals with Leopold Bloom's attempts to conceal his Jewishness, and the "invisibility" of Ellison's protagonist can also be understood as an attempt to camouflage difference. Passing also plays a role in the novels of Carpentier, the white, European-educated elitist—which might come as less of a surprise if one considers the details of his biography. Born in Switzerland, Carpentier spent most of his life "passing" as a native Cuban, except for one moment when he "passed" in reverse, borrowing the Frenchman Robert Desnos' passport to leave the island in order to escape political persecution.

Betrayal, as well, appears as a prominent theme in the texts authored by Johnson, Joyce, Ellison and Carpentier. Johnson, for example frames his decision to pass as white as an act of treachery towards his race—selling his heritage for a mess of potage. *Ulysses* is built around Molly's adulterous assignation with Blazes Boylan; Ellison shades all of his character's actions in terms of loyalty and betrayal; and Carpentier's *El acoso*, a

central text in this study, relates the consequences of a revolutionary's betrayal of his former comrades.

This dissertation will build on the scholarly foundation—by no means uncontested—that traces a subversive impulse in these authors' treatments of camouflage and betrayal (Cheng, Lloyd, Baker). I will connect that subversion to these authors' readings (listenings?) of music and musical forms. As my use of a "jazz matrix" indicates, jazz will be a key tool in this process. But I do not mean to imply that all four authors' texts can be tied directly to jazz music—anymore than the writings of Frederick Douglass (to borrow Baker's example) or Hemingway (to borrow Murray's) can be said to derive directly from actual blues music. Again, Joyce provides a useful model. Music in his work, in particular, tends to come from different sources: from the Western Classical tradition, and from folk and popular sources in Dublin. Nonetheless, as early as 1921, when Clive Bell equated modernism with jazz, he wrote of Joyce (dismissively) as someone who "rags the literary instrument" ("Plus de jazz").

Indeed Genevieve Abravanel, in a recent article in the *Journal of Modern Literature*, argues that Joyce purposefully used an Americanized language in *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake*—which she ties, through Michael North, to black American vernacular—to "to forge a space for Irishness within the English language but in resistance to the British Empire" (155). Joyce took advantage, she suggests, of an emerging modernist reality in which, "with the rise of American English, for perhaps the first time in recent memory the old imperial center was no longer the linguistic center" (155). Where jazz can help us, with all of these authors, is in seeing the possibilities of

the "impossible harmonies" as a metaphor for cohering incoherence, a model for assertion "within and against the group."

Methodology and Chapter Outline

Since this study involves authors from different traditions, writing at different times and from different countries, there is no simple or obvious way to organize my chapters. *Impossible Harmonies* does chart some influences—of Joyce on Carpentier, and of Johnson on Ellison—but it is not an influence study *per se*. So while my chapters are organized roughly chronologically, in that the first author to publish (Johnson) appears first and the last (Ellison) appears last, I prefer to think of this study in terms of Lezama Lima's technique of "reminiscent reading," which Heller describes as "a creative linking together of texts in order to effect their mutual illumination" (25). Lezama Lima calls reminiscent reading a "carnal, copulative" process, and my text couplings may seem at times promiscuous, even messy or disordered. But, as Heller notes, the methodology "avoids the pitfalls of traditional studies of 'influence' and disrupts traditional schemas of master and apprentice, predecessor and follower, in favor of a counterpoint of voices" (21). Heller's apt use of the term *counterpoint* points to another aim for my chapter order. Unlike Carpentier and Joyce, I claim no strict musical structure for my work. But I do see the texts I analyze as voices interacting in counterpoint, elaborating and illuminating my research question. I hope, in some measure, to create my own impossible harmony, a tense but unified whole that coheres not only within each chapter but also between them.

This dissertation consists of three chapters that use the theoretical concepts laid out in the previous pages to address the research questions developed in this introduction. The first chapter, "The Harlem Neobaroque and James Weldon Johnson's Jazz Writings," begins by considering Salim Washington's critique of Johnson's novel *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* as a bourgeois, assimilationist text. I propose that an alternative reading of the novel based on a New World Baroque understanding of cultural dynamics complicates Washington's thesis without contradicting his observations on the centrality of music in the novel and its development of a "mulatto-based" ethic. Moreover, I argue that a New World Baroque reading of *The Autobiography* is appropriate, given the impact of Johnson's childhood in a tri-cultural area of Florida, his diplomatic service in Latin America, and his readings of Cuban nationalist poets and essayists on the complicated view of race expressed in *The Autobiography*—specifically given the ways in which those influences contributed to Johnson's growing conception of blackness as occupying the center of US cultural expression.

Before turning to the novel itself, Chapter 1 considers Johnson's 1922 translation of the sonnet "Despedida a mi madre" (1844) by Afro-Cuban poet Plácido (Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés) in order to establish, first, the depth of Johnson's connections to Latin America and, second, the extent to which Latin American *barroquismo* appealed to both Johnson's aesthetics and his political projects. Johnson published his translation as an appendix to *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, alongside the original Spanish and an earlier translation by US Romantic poet William Cullen Bryant. Bearing this in mind, I will read Johnson's "Plácido's Farewell to his Mother" as contesting Bryant's version,

which treats the poem's speaker as a tragic Romantic and nationalist hero. Johnson's version, I argue, recovers the poem's baroque ambiguity and humor and *un*covers a blues song within the sonnet, placing the poem into conversation with blues poetry like that of Langston Hughes.

In examining *The Autobiography*, Chapter 1 affords special attention to the notion of canonicity Johnson expresses in the novel. Specifically, we will find in the novel's "Big Meeting" scene a reflection of modernist anxiety over canon formation and read Johnson's presentation of the characters "Singing Johnson" and "John Brown" as a response to a modernist vision that extended Enlightenment and Romantic ideas of greatness. In other words, we will read the "Big Meeting" as proposing an *alternative* canonicity, a notion of greatness based on community, improvisation, and performativity; and a re-envisioning of originality as based on the use and re-use of texts rather than the creation of new texts out of whole cloth. This is a contentious reading, since it works against ideas Johnson supported in his essays and editorials; my goal will be to disturb the "harmony" that Washington finds between the novel and Johnson's nonfiction.

In this reading, too, we will find parallels to New World Baroque theory, and to Monika Kaup's assertion that the Neobaroque represents an alternative modernism for the Americas. Given Sarduy's explication of baroque and neobaroque literary techniques, listed above, *The Autobiography*'s tone, and its narrator's insistence that the text represents a "practical joke" on society take on added significance. In the last section on the novel, I will consider the novel's strange humor, its playful use of irony, and its emphasis on ellipsis and occlusion as characteristics that can be described both as "baroque" and as part of the "blues matrix" outlined by Baker. Chapter 1 closes by

arguing that these two themes are inseparable. If we want to read *The Autobiography* as a "blues" novel, as Baker does, or as a proto-jazz ragtime novel, as Barnhart does (2006), we must also acknowledge that the work uses those musical forms in neobaroque ways. *The Autobiography* provides a fitting model: the narrator builds his reputation and makes his living "turning classic music into rag-time," a clear parallel to the "irreverent replay of classical forms" that Carpentier says characterizes baroque art in the Americas.

Chapter 2 will trace Carpentier's evolving interactions with African American music and its role in, first, the development of the Cuban's ideas about national culture and, later, his understanding of the New World Baroque. The chapter actually begins in the middle of Carpentier's career, with his novel *El acoso*, which I will explore in comparison with the Sirens chapter of Joyce's *Ulysses*. I will highlight Joyce's hybrid use of musical forms and analyze how that hybridity serves as a strategy by which he undermines colonial authority by seeming to reproduce it. Chapter 2 thus examines how Carpentier's understanding of Joyce's strategy shaped his writing from the 1950s on, but also seeks to answer a question this raises: if Joyce's Sirens offers a polyvocal model for cultural interaction in national discourse, and Carpentier repeatedly underscored the centrality of Afro-Cuban culture in Cuba's national identity, why does Afro-Cuban culture play such a small role in *El acoso*? Why, for example, do the musical forms Carpentier embedded in the text not include the *son?* If Joyce, who contrasted Western classical forms with Irish folk music in Sirens, serves as Carpentier's model, why does Carpentier's Caribbean identity have to be reached, in Antonio Benítez-Rojo's words, "via a Western vehicle" (237)?

To answer this question we will have to consider the length of Carpentier's career-long struggle to define *cubanidad* in music and in literature, beginning with his early experiments in *negrismo*, continuing through his renunciation of that work in the 1940s and 1950s, and extending to 1974's *Concierto barroco*, in which—I argue—a *son* structure does shape the text, and which Gonzalo Celorio calls a "rich, inventive, *liberating* novel" ("Lyrics and Sol-fa of the Baroque," my emphasis). This struggle, we will see, is interwoven with Carpentier's lifelong fascination with jazz, which is expressed in his earliest writings and extends into the surprising appearance of Louis Armstrong in *Concierto barroco*.

Paradoxically, I will argue that *Concierto barroco*'s newly recovered enthusiasm for African-descendant music forms comes not from increased study in African American and Afro-Cuban music, but instead from Carpentier's developing understanding of the New World Baroque and the resulting conclusion that, in Roberto González Echevarría's words, "Jazz is, at the end, the new beginning… it is the 'impossible harmony,' the baroque concert" (*Pilgrim* 269). This observation moves Carpentier into the jazz matrix and thus in line with the ideology that is latent in Johnson's novel and more visible in *Invisible Man.* It also helps us to see *El acoso* as a hinge work, an axis between Carpentier's early ideas of national identity and his later, more complex thinking on the subject. We will see, in other words, Carpentier move from a nation-building narrative that treats African-derived music forms as material to be exploited by white composers to a notion of jazz as a baroque end in itself. Our readings of *El acoso*, *Concierto barroco*, and Carpentier's writings on jazz and Afro-Cuban music will illustrate González Echevarría's claim that, whereas "in the earlier fiction Carpentier attempted to galvanize

the mixture of cultural—textual—elements in one, new, homogenous entity," in *Concierto barroco* "there is an abandonment to the heterogeneity of warring contraries" (*Pilgrim* 267-8).

"Heterogeneity of warring contraries" is a useful phrase to keep in mind in Chapter 3, where I analyze the jazz nature of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man.* In Chapter 1, I compare Carpentier's Filomeno to James Weldon Johnson's narrator in *The Autobiography*. In Chapter 3, I focus on Filomeno's "ancestor," the warrior Salvador Golomón, in tracing the importance of the figure of the black soldier in Ellison's writings on race in the United States. Ellison's father, Lewis, served in the 25th Infantry Regiment, one of the famous "Buffalo Soldier" units of the US Army, and Ellison claimed that veterans of the Spanish-American war drilled jazz's swing into him and his friends on the fields of his school in Oklahoma City. The importance of the war theme is apparent in the first pages of *Invisible Man*, when the narrator's grandfather frames his life as a war (in which he says he has been a traitor). And in his introduction to the 1981 edition of the book, Ellison writes that he was particularly interested in the notion of a war-within-a-war, in the black soldier's struggle not just against an external enemy but also against the nation itself.

Ellison uses jazz as a metaphor to explore these dynamics in both his essays and in *Invisible Man*. Jazz, according to Ellison, is "antagonistic cooperation" and "an art of individual assertion within and against the group." Chapter 3 will examine how those tendencies manifest themselves in *Invisible Man*'s simultaneous embrace of chaos and order. Further, I analyze how Ellison turns jazz's impulse for quotation into a neobaroque metacriticism, focusing on *Invisible Man*'s intertextual comments on Edgar Allen Poe's

"The System of Dr. Tarr and Professor Fether," Henry Melville's *Benito Cereno*, Joyce's *Ulysses*, and Johnson's *Along This Way.* I will argue that *Invisible Man*'s Golden Day episode, much like the Big Meeting in *The Autobiography*, fashions an alternative modernism by critiquing traditional notions of canon formation.

New *New World Symphonies*: Jazz and the Nation-Building Narrative

A final lens through which to examine Johnson, Carpentier, and Ellison's musical fiction is their interaction with the idea, developed in the late 1800s but still prominent in the first half of the 20th Century, of what Noelle Morrissette (2013) calls the "nation-building" narrative. In this narrative, attributed to French critic Hippolyte Taine but strongly associated in music with Czech composer Antonín Dvořák, folk art forms that spring from a people serve as "material," building blocks for a national culture that can achieve the universal standards required of "civilization." As Morrissette puts it, in this view "the ascension of folk culture to civilization marks the birth of a national culture" (109).

Dvořák, who directed the National Conservatory of Music in New York from 1892 until 1895, specifically emphasized the importance of African American elements for the possible development of national music in the US. "In the Negro melodies of America I discover all that is needed for a great and noble music," Dvořák told the *Boston Herald* (May 28, 1893). "There is nothing in the whole range of composition that cannot be supplied with themes from this source." Dvořák worked themes from spirituals into his *New World Symphony* and, as Guthrie P. Ramsey documents, this narrative was

assimilated into the New Negro rhetoric of the Harlem Renaissance. With this rhetoric, Alain Locke and other prominent New York writers aimed to advance the black race by creating great works of art, including music. These "great works," Ramsey notes, were meant to be movements away from the vernacular forms that could be heard in the day's cabarets, bars, and nightclubs (23).

Though the nation-building narrative has been criticized, for reasons listed above, as assimilationist or appropriationist, Ramsey points out that, for writers such as Johnson, Dvořák's sentiments provided a framework for what could, to the contrary, be read as a sort of black nationalism. The essentialism inherent in the nation-building narrative, for example, could be tied to a "noble" African origin for black music forms such as the spirituals and the blues. Ramsey writes, "By promoting racial pride through 'the glories of the racial past' (Meier 1988, 51), Johnson's philosophy resonated with a more militant strain of black nationalism…" (24). Nonetheless, Dvořák's musical nation-building narrative has to be seen as a double-edged sword for black thinkers: on the one hand, it undercuts arguments of white supremacy, underscoring the centrality of black contributions to New World culture; on the other, it locates black culture at a level below universal culture or "civilization," which is understood to reflect Western/European standards and values.

Johnson, Carpentier, and Ellison all take the nation-building narrative seriously, and much of their writings on national music and, in turn, their musical fiction can be seen as a reaction to it. Writing about "American Music," Johnson, who was acquainted with Dvořák's student Harry T. Burleigh, quoted approvingly French actress Yvette Guilbert's comments restating Dvořák's thesis:

> In America, apart from a few ditties like 'Suwanee River,' the only beautiful folk-songs I have found are Negro melodies. I don't know why Americans have done so little in the folk-song field. Perhaps they have been too busy to concern themselves with such things. (286)[11]

Despite comments like this, and despite his close association with Locke, Johnson's writings, especially *The Autobiography*, do not uncritically reflect the nation-building narrative. Instead, as I will argue in Chapter 1, Johnson finds a tension between the uplift promised by the narrative's harmonizing impulse and its depreciation of African American achievements like jazz and ragtime. Samuel Floyd claims that, whatever the Harlem Renaissance's official stance towards classical art music, "the 'primitive' and 'degenerate' secular music of the period manifested the aesthetic of the movement better than any other resource available" (5). Johnson's writing, as we will see, illustrates his point well.

Carpentier engages Dvořák's notions of national music in "El folklorismo musical" (1957) and other essays, and of the three authors of this study, the Cuban seems to embrace the nation-building narrative most readily. Writing about George Gershwin's lyric opera *Porgy and Bess*, he justifies the composer's use of African American themes by asserting that "el negro norteamericano, en este siglo, ha universalizado sus expresiones artísticas." Praising *Porgy and Bess*, Carpentier continues, "Desde tal punto de vista, *Porgy and Bess* resulta una auténtica ópera nacional, como es, en su plano, *La*

[11] Johnson points out that "Suwanee River," written by Stephen Foster, is also based on "Negro melodies," further evidence supporting his thesis: "To sum up the matter, nothing of artistic value has come out of the United States which has made a universal appeal to the world, except that which has been created by the American Negro" ("American Music" 286-7).

novia vendida de Smetana" (*"Porgy and Bess*" 110). His praise for the work, in fact, mirrors his support for Cuban composers Amadeo Roldán and Alejandro García Caturla, and reflects his hopes for the future of Cuban music.[12] But the anti-nationalist nationalism that Lloyd sees at work in Joyce's *Ulysses*, and which exerts great influence on the composition of *El acoso*, sits uneasily next to the idea of nation-building, ultimately rendering the narrative untenable. The result of this tension, I will argue, is *Concierto barroco*.

Regarding Ellison, Anderson notes that by the time he had enrolled at the Tuskegee Institute, the nation-building narrative had hardened into a "New Negro doxa" (283). Ellison flatly rejected the notion that black artistic forms were in any way inferior to European ones or that they needed to be enriched in order to achieve civilized standards. "Bessie Smith singing a good blues may deal with experience as profoundly as Eliot…" Ellison wrote to his friend Albert Murray. Dvořák's *New World Symphony* does make a telling appearance in *Invisible Man*: the narrator hears snatches of it as he leaves, for the last time, an assembly at his college. Facing expulsion, the narrator feels nostalgia for the promise he is leaving behind; at the same time, he is repulsed to hear strains of "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," his grandfather and mother's favorite spiritual, appropriated in the European composer's piece.[13]

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[12] "Obras como los *Tres pequeños poemas* de Amadeo Roldán nos ofrecen visiones poderosas y certreras de una alta música cubana, creada con los más auténticos elementos vernáculos" ("Amadeo Roldán" 85).

[13] "Then the orchestra played excerpts from Dovrak's *New World Symphony* and I kept hearing 'Swing Low Sweet Chariot' resounding through its dominant theme—my mother's and grandfather's favorite spiritual. It was more than I could stand, and before the next speaker could begin I hurried past the disapproving eyes of teachers and matrons, out into the night" (104).

On leaving the assembly, the narrator sees a mockingbird perched on the statue of the college's founder, "flipping its moon-mad tail above the head of the eternally kneeling slave" (104). Ellison spends much of his essay "On Bird, Bird-Watching, and Jazz" (1962) connecting the mockingbird to bebop alto saxophonist Charlie Parker (Spaulding 498-9). The scene thus affords me an apt image with which to begin this investigation: jazz as an alternative to the nation-building narrative, as a guiding counter-narrative for our study. As we look at three authors who worked at assimilating black cultural expressions into national and nationalist discourses, and who vociferously asserted the importance of doing so, Ellison's mockingbird emblematizes the unassimilability of those expressions, the recognition of which came to each of these authors, at different times and to different extents.

Chapter 1:

The Harlem Baroque and James Weldon Johnson's Jazz Writings

1.1 Introduction and Theoretical Background: TransLatin Johnson

1.1.1 Introduction

The preface to James Weldon Johnson's 1922 collection *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, says Noelle Morisette, "rests not so much on a foundation theory of black culture as on a series of gaps or contradictions." One contradiction she points out is the project's national scope juxtaposed with "the inclusion of the poetry of Cuban writer Plácido in translation" (130). She is referring to the book's lone appendix: "Plácido's Farewell to His Mother," Johnson's translation of Plácido's sonnet "Despedida a mi madre," placed next to the original Spanish and an earlier translation by US Romantic poet William Cullen Bryant.

The poem's inclusion is unexpected, given that Johnson has, from the start, emphasized the North American nature of the book. In the preface's first paragraph, Johnson says that he will focus on the question of the "status of the Negro in the United States," and that he will build from the "startling" thesis that the black race in the US can lay claim to being "the creator of the only things artistic that have yet sprung from American soil and been universally acknowledged as distinctive American products" (9-10). While the racial nature of Johnson's question makes a certain amount of comparison to poetry written by black authors in other countries understandable, Johnson dedicates a

surprising four pages to Afro-Latino poetry, focusing particularly on Plácido, even offering biographical information on the poet in order to provide context for his translation of the sonnet.[14] Johnson himself would later admit that he "went a little afield" with his digression into Latin America (*Along This Way* 375).

A partial explanation for this digression appears in his acknowledgments: first thanks there go to his friend Arturo Schomburg, who "placed his valuable collection of books by Negro authors" at Johnson's disposal (48). Schomburg, a Puerto Rico-born art collector and bibliophile, shared with Johnson a mission to reveal the centrality of black contributions to Western culture, to vindicate, in Johnson's words, the birth right of blacks to the culture they had helped create.[15] For Schomburg, this was always a cross-cultural project, with manifestations in national arts and literatures of Latin America and Spain, as well as the United States. The texts and artifacts in Schomburg's library reflected the international scope of his aims. This fact raises an interesting question: what does it mean that, in formulating his compendium of African American poetry, Johnson relied on a library designed to further an Afro-diasporic vision of culture?

It's likely, for one, that Schomburg, author of a widely circulated pamphlet (1909) on Plácido, influenced Johnson's enthusiasm for the Afro-Cuban poet. But Johnson had already included a translation of another of Plácido's sonnets in *Fifty Years and Other Poems* (1917), and his knowledge of Latin American literature dates at least to his years

[14] Johnson dedicates more space in the Preface to Plácido than to any other poet except for Phyllis Wheatley and Paul Laurence Dunbar.
[15] "This land is ours by right of birth, / This land is ours by right of toil," Johnson wrote in "Fifty Years" (*BANP* 131).

in the US consular service in Venezuela and Nicaragua.[16] It is possible, then, to situate Johnson's contact with Schomburg as part of a larger pattern in Johnson's life and work. Specifically, Latin American concepts of race and nation left traces throughout the body of Johnson's writing, traces that can be read as distinct baroque tinge.

In this chapter, I propose to explore those traces, focusing especially on *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912). Building on Roberto González Echevarría's reading of Nicolás Guillén's sonnet "El abuelo," I argue that the novel's central gesture, the narrator's decision to "pass" for white, is an echo of the sixteenth-century Spanish poet Luis de Góngora's baroque tendency to work "at the margins of Western tradition, at the point where the tradition subverts itself by nurturing forces that negate its mainstream ideology" (*Celestina's Brood* 197). I trace several baroque characteristics through the novel, ultimately arguing that the novel, which its narrator describes as a "joke" on society, expresses the sense of parody and play that Sarduy says defines the Neobaroque.

While *The Autobiography* will serve as a central text in this chapter, I will also consider Johnson's translation of "Despedida a mi madre." Johnson's revisions of Bryant's Romantic nineteenth-century version recuperate the *barroquismo* of the piece.

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[16] In *Along this Way*, Johnson writes of the town of León, near his station in Corinto, Nicaragua: "I was an accepted visitor at a number of houses there, and became acquainted with members of León's literary group. Among the boasts of León was its leadership in literature; and it was not an empty boast; León was the birthplace and home of Rubén Darío (1867-1916), the foremost and widest known figure in Latin American letters in his generation, and a world influence on modern literature in the Spanish language" (261). We should note, though, that Johnson's friendship with Schomburg predates his diplomatic service, as he relates in *Along this Way* that the Puerto Rican gave him a letter of introduction to the mayor of San Juan, where his ship stopped en route to his first post in Puerto Cabello (227). Most likely, Johnson's knowledge of Latin American literature predates his diplomatic service as well, since Johnson had been speaking Spanish since his boyhood (*Along this Way* 59).

Johnson pares down the poem's diction, deflating the Romantic pomp of Bryant's version and restoring the ambiguity of the poem's first line as well as the bitter, ironic humor of the poem's sextet. In doing so, Johnson modernizes the poem, but his modernism critiques Enlightenment rationality rather than extending it, as Bryant's version does. As such, Johnson's translation presents an alternative modernity, emphasizing the function that Kaup claims the baroque serves in twentieth-century discourse (*Neobaroque* 6-11).

The aesthetic choices Johnson made in translating "Despedida a mi madre" foreshadow his later poetry, especially the seven "sermons in verse" in *God's Trombones* (1927), in which Johnson eschewed traditional Negro dialect and sought in language an "instrument of greater range," one that might fuse "Negro idioms with Bible English" ("Preface" 8). At the same time, the poem's themes of miscegenation and bastardization also dominate his earlier work, especially *The Autobiography*, and its performative nature, hybridity, and intertextuality connect to baroque characteristics throughout Johnson's writing. As such, and owing to its placement in Johnson's statement on the nature of black poetics, I argue that the poem offers a unique lens for understanding Johnson's idea of the relation among race, nation, and aesthetics. If *The Auobiography* is this chapter's central text, "Plácido's Farewell to his Mother" will serve us as a key with which we might unlock what, exactly, Latin America meant to Johnson, and how he related a Latin American imaginary to his own struggles to create art that was simultaneously "black" and "American."

Although Latin American influences and baroque aesthetics appear throughout much of Johnson's writing, a more obvious (less occluded) center of his work is musicality. Through the course of this chapter, these themes will become inseparable. As

we will see, in Johnson's hands, "Plácido's Farewell to his Mother" becomes a blues poem; in other words, Johnson finds the blues at work in a Cuban poem. Similarly, If we want to read *The Autobiography* as a "blues" novel, as Baker (1984) might,[17] or as a proto-jazz ragtime novel, as Bruce Barnhart (2006) does, we have to also acknowledge that the work uses those musical forms in neobaroque ways. *The Autobiography* provides a fitting model: the narrator builds his reputation and makes his living "turning classics into rag-time," a clear parallel to the "irreverent replay of classical forms" that Carpentier says characterizes baroque art in the Americas.

1.1.2 Musical Johnson

Since the ultimate goal of this chapter is to explore musicality in Johnson, it will be worthwhile at outset to indicate why that is an important enterprise. In the first place, the life and works of Johnson, who wrote in the first three decades of the twentieth century, reflect the tension between literary and musical production that characterizes the other subjects of this study, James Joyce, Alejo Carpentier, and Ralph Ellison. Johnson's career included a stint as a teacher that ended when he headed to New York to team with his brother, J. Rosamund Johnson, as a Tin Pan Alley songwriter. Later, after years as a statesman (Johnson served as US consul in Puerto Cabello, Venezuela and Corinto, Nicaragua), Johnson would become a prominent officer in the newly formed NAACP, as

[17] In his book on the blues matrix, Baker does not use *The Autobiogaphy* as one of his primary examples, instead offering close readings of Frederick Douglass, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and Toni Morrison. But elsewhere he calls *The Autobiography* a "forgotten prototype" of *Invisible Man*, and he places Johnson within an "accomplished tradition" including not only Ellison, but also Douglass and Wright, along with Langston Hughes ("Prototype" 41). Given those associations, and given the specific ways Baker defines his "blues matrix," it seems reasonable to assume that he would also read *The Autobiography* from within that matrix.

well as a columnist, author, and editor. Still, Johnson never gave up his interest in music, or his involvement in its criticism, archiving, and production: like Carpentier's columns in *El nacional*, his *New York Age* editorials could frequently be classified as music criticism, and like Carpentier's *Music in Cuba*, his two volumes of the *The Book of American Negro Spirituals* (1925, 1926) were widely recognized as landmark achievements of musical research.

Johnson also shared with Carpentier a tendency to think about his literary work in musical terms. Describing Johnson's writings on writing, Brent Hayes Edwards (1998) observes:

> What interests me is the peculiar intrusion of a musical trope in Johnson's description of the compositional process. The transcription of folk material into written form is *like* the music composer's 'use of a folk theme' in a symphony. In Johnson's work on poetics there is almost never a description of a direct transmission from the oral to the written: almost always, the figure of music intercedes. Music as a metaphor seems a necessary mediating element in the process of linguistic transcription. (588)

Salim Washington extends this observation to the whole of Johnson's work, finding special significance in Johnson's decision to make the narrator of *The Autobiography* a musician, classically trained but with extensive experience in the nightclubs of Harlem. Washington calls music a "racial marker" in the novel, concluding that Johnson presents his narrator's shifting black identities "primarily through his involvement with black music" (239). In particular, Washington sees Johnson's portrayals of what might be

called "proto-jazz"[18] as a metaphor for his placement of black identity within North American culture. Fixing on *The Autobiography*'s narrator's desire to transform black themes into music that could hold up to the classical tradition, Washington argues that the novel subordinates popular black music to Western art music. In Washington's words, the narrator's actions represent "a misguided impulse to *improve* African American music by transforming it into forms developed for the European art music tradition" (247).

1.1.3 Music, Nation, and Race in Johnson

For Washington, this metaphor illustrates a "mulatto-centered, American nationalism" (233) which contrasts with the black nationalism whose proponents, Washington says, have responded to *The Autobiography* with "contempt or sheer neglect" (236). Washington writes, "Rather than making a case for black liberation, ultimately [*The Autobiography*] argues for a race blind America whose progressiveness and strength is to be measured by its success in blending the gifts of its various 'races' into a democratic, national culture" (233). Although Washington refrains from passing a value judgment on this "American nationalism," it is easy enough to see how his observations might support an accusation of assimilationism, or even encouragement of cultural whitening, accusations that might be reflected in the conflict of the 1960s and 1970s between writers such as Amiri Baraka and Albert Murray, to whom Washington

[18] "It was perhaps too early to call this music jazz," Washington writes, "at least in a novel… The term 'jazz' had not yet achieved canonical status and would not be widely known for another five years after the publishing date when the Original Dixieland Jazz Band made a hit in 1917, cutting the first commercial jazz recording, 'Barnyard Stable Blues.' Contemporary artists referred to their music oftentimes as rag or ragtime where modern commentators would use other terms" (245).

compares Johnson.[19] Furthering these negative implications, Washington highlights several of Johnson's assumptions that would be "frowned upon" today, including a racial essentialism that caused him to locate the black racial genius in musical talent, and depictions of the mulatta body that both denigrate blackness and display a troubling masculinism. Citing *The Autobiography*'s descriptions of girls "of the delicate brown shades, with black eyes and wavy dark hair [who] were decidedly pretty," Washington writes, "This tendency to relegate those of obvious Negroid phenotype to servile positions, while attributing uncommon beauty to those of mixed phenotype, could be construed as Johnson once again indulging in the very stereotypes that he openly deplored in his criticism of Negro poetry" (238).

In many ways, the questions that Washington raises echo criticisms scholars in Latin American Studies have leveled at white elites' attempts to locate national identities in *mestizo* cultures. Aníbal Quijano (1999), for example, has analyzed the ways these attempts center the notion of racial and national improvement in forms of *blanqueamiento*, often literally, by encouraging intermarriage among whites and blacks, or by promoting and investing in immigration from European countries. Even the promotion of black cultural achievements, these critics posit, is problematic because they

[19] "Johnson's cultural perspective is actually closer to Albert Murray's concept of the Omni-American of a mulatto nation and culture than it is to a dialectic between social integration and black nationalism. In fact, the real tragedy in *The Autobiography* is not necessarily that the ex-colored man is a black man who passed for white. Rather, it is that he was an Omni-American who, to his psychological detriment and spiritual impoverishment, turned his back on the realities of United Statesian culture and opted for the Manichean views of racialized thinking" (238). It is worth remembering, in citing Washington, that much of the attitude he attributes to Johnson can be found in the writings of Alain Locke, who was far less concerned than Johnson with questions of "passing," and that these cultural approaches thus do not depend on a celebration of racial ambiguity or *mulatez*.

tend to be celebrated only in terms of their improvement through combination with white, European forms. Robin Moore (1997) has applied this critique to nationalist constructions of Cuban music, which he calls "a means of studying processes of ideological unification wherein the oppositional expression of the few is transformed discursively and practically into 'everyone's music'" (5). Moore writes:

> African-derived culture in an abstract sense may have been essential to dominant conceptions of *cubanidad* beginning in the 1930s, but in many of its traditional forms it continued to be condemned as backward, lewd, or primitive, as it sometimes is even today. An appreciation for the inconsistencies between 1920s *afrocubanismo* as an ideology embracing black expression discursively and the extent to which traditional Afrocuban arts were actually accepted is vital in evaluating the significance of the period. Even more important, the mass acceptance of certain forms of black music and dance by Cuban society did not necessarily imply greater social equality for or empowerment of Afrocubans themselves. (5)

Samuel A. Floyd, Jr. sees a parallel dynamic at work in the writings of several black Harlem Renaissance writers, including Johnson, noting that they worked toward "the transformation of black folk culture into a formal or higher culture—an art of greater value" (29). The implication, of course, is that black culture as is must be of lesser value than the European culture which "improves" it—a contradiction in line with the "inconsistencies" Moore sees in Cuban intellectuals' embrace of *afrocubanismo*. Building on Floyd's observations, Luiza Franco Moreira (2012) compares Johnson's

colleague and editor Alain Locke's writings on African American spirituals to Carpentier's celebrations of *afrocubanismo* and Brazilian Mario de Andrade's *mestiço* writings. "Their arguments share an analogous overall framework," she concludes, in that "[a]ll three take European musical nationalism as a model but reinterpret what constitutes folklore in order to develop an approach to black vernacular musics" (224). Though Moreira is careful to articulate the differences in the positions of Carpentier, the white elite outsider to Afro-Cuban music, Locke, the "Dean" of the Harlem Renaissance, and Andrade, the *mestiço* who "does not fit easily into the neat opposition between 'black' and 'white' that is most familiar in the English-speaking world," she finds similar problems at work in the three authors' works, especially in the assumptions and implications of the writings of Locke and Carpentier. Much of Moreira's argument regarding Locke could apply equally to Johnson, whose views on the centrality of blackness in North American culture were closely aligned with Locke's.[20]

Of course, an essential distinction remains between Johnson and the (mostly) white Cuban elites Moore criticizes for "nationalizing blackness." As a black man, Johnson resists accusations of appropriating black forms for white purposes. In fact, his writings challenge white appropriations with both historical observation and humor:

> Since ragtime has swept the world and become universally known as American music, there have been attempts to rob the Negro of the credit of originating it; but this is in accord with an old habit of the white race; as

[20] Moreira highlights a passage from Locke's essay "The Negro Spirituals" in which Locke writes, "It may not be readily conceded that the song of the Negro is America's folk song; but if the spirituals are what we think them to be, a classic folk expression, then this is their ultimate destiny" (199). The notion that "America's folk song" is black is one that Johnson articulated in *The Autobiography* and then repeated insistently throughout his *New York Age* columns in the 1910s and 1920s.

> soon as anything is recognized as great, they set about to claim credit for it. In this manner they have attempted to rob the Negro of the credit of originating the plantation stories and songs. We all remember how after the Russo-Japanese war attempts were made to classify the Japanese as white. In the same way, scholars have 'doubted' that the Zulus are real Negroes. Had Jack Johnson continued as champion, somebody would have tried to prove that he was not a real Negro. ("The Poor White Musician" 285)

Johnson's letters from his post in Venezuela reveal, too, that he was aware of the problems of *mestizo*-based notions of racial harmony, foretelling the criticisms that would be leveled decades later. Eugene Levy, citing Johnson's correspondence with Booker T. Washington, notes that Johnson "bemoaned the fact that the Negro '*as a Negro,*' would leave no mark on Venezuela" (111).

Any consideration of the racial politics in Johnson's writings must keep these complications in mind. Still, the problems that Washington points out remain, and if Johnson is clear of any charges of race appropriation, critiques like Washington's raise a specter just as unappealing: race betrayal, or willing submission to white norms. Since Washington compares Johnson to Murray, it is useful here to explore the implications of that comparison. In a 1996 profile of Murray, Henry Louis Gates calls the publication of *The Omni-Americans* a "foolhardy" act, coming as it did in the heavily nationalist milieu of 1970, which Gates describes as "the days when the Black Power movement smoldered, when militancy was the mode and rage de rigeur" ("King of Cats" 72). Into this environment, Murray lobbed a book that echoed Johnson's themes of racial uplift,

declaring that "Not only is it the so-called middle class Negro who challenges the status quo in schools, housing, voting practices and so on, he is also the one who is most likely to challenge total social structures and value systems" (qtd. in Gates 72).

Another useful comparison, one I will draw out more fully in my fourth chapter, would be to Murray's friend Ralph Ellison, who was often derided for establishment, integrationist views. Peniel Joseph relates an incident in which Ellison, called an Uncle Tom after a panel at Grinell College, broke down in tears, saying "I am not a Tom, I am not a Tom" (440). Gates corroborates, writing that "On the occasions that Ralph Ellison, an avatar of elegance, was invited to college campuses, blacks invariably denounced him for his failure to involve himself in the civil-rights struggle, for his evident disdain for the posturings of Black Power" ("King of Cats" 72).

While Johnson wrote in a very different milieu, he had his own debates with high-profile black nationalists. Most notably, Johnson occasionally used his *New York Age* column to rail against Marcus Garvey and ridicule Garvey's followers. Like Murray in the 1960s, Johnson directly addressed charges of assimilationism, writing in his *New York Age* editorial of September 2, 1922, "When Mr. Garvey expresses the belief that any time a negro associates with white people he feels so flattered that he becomes a boot-licking sycophant and a parasite, he is revealing what the Freudian psychologists would call an inferiority complex" ("Marcus Garvey's Inferior Complex" 134). Two weeks before that, on August 19, Johnson had called a meeting of Garveyites at Liberty Hall in New York "the apotheosis of the ridiculous" (133).

1.1.4 Contra Washington

The following pages will build on Edwards' and Washington's observations on the centrality of music to Johnson's writing, and on Washington's contention that, for Johnson, music serves as a metaphor for the development of culture in a multi-racial society. Again, in Johnson's writing, questions about what music *means* are necessarily questions about the interaction of black and white cultures. And the inverse is also true: when we talk about Johnson, questions about race and culture have to be explored through his writings on (and with) music. But this chapter will also complicate Washington's thesis. Specifically, I will explore how Johnson's interactions with the baroque cultures of Latin America (and with baroque elements of the culture of the US South) offered a mode of racial resistance, a mode that leaves traces that are especially clear in *The Autobiography*. In essence, looking at New World Baroque theory will help us better understand how, to borrow Murray's phrase, Johnson's middle-class aspirations in fact "challenge total social structures and value systems" of white supremacist North American society.

I propose, in other words, a synthesis of models long used to explicate texts by African American authors, such as Houston A. Baker's "blues matrix" and Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s notion of "Signifyin(g)", with a model that has been used in Latin American literary and cultural studies. Of course, this presents a number of problems, which it will be useful to consider at the outset. The most pressing of these is the cultural specificity that both Baker and (to a lesser extent) Gates claim for their models. Baker insists that the blues that "condition Afro-America's cultural signifying" (5) are a fundamentally (North) American phenomenon. Similarly, Gates asserts that African American literature can

only be understood in relation to the (English) linguistic tradition for which it serves as a "parallel discursive universe" (xxii).[21] He explains:

> Black writers, like critics of black literature, learn to write by reading literature, especially the canonical texts of the Western tradition. Consequently, black texts resemble other, Western texts. The black texts employ many of the conventions of literacy form that comprise the Western tradition. Black literature shares much with, far more than it differs from, the Western textual tradition, primarily as registered in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and French. But black formal repetition always repeats with a difference, a black difference that manifests itself in specific language use. And the repository that contains the language that is the source—and the reflection—of black difference is the black English vernacular tradition. (xxiii)

Later, Gates repeats this idea that language divides (at least partially) New World black cultures, noting that each of the New World's colonizing languages and cultures "informed the precise structures that each discrete New World Pan-African culture assumed" (4). But while this makes a good case for studying African American cultures *per se*, it does not preclude an examination of the liminal spaces where African American, Latin American, Afro-Caribbean, and Afro-Latin cultural expressions overlap

[21] Gates also asserts that the figure of the Signifying Monkey is unique to African American culture. But he ties it to Esu, another trickster figure that comes from the Yoruban tradition and survives in the mythologies of Nigeria, Benin, Brazil, Cuba, and Haiti. Though he stresses the differences between the two figures, Gates writes that "Nevertheless, the central place of both figures in their traditions is determined by their curious tendency to reflect on the uses of formal language" and "[t]he theory of Signifyin(g) arises from these moments of self-reflexiveness" (xxi).

and intersect. In fact, Gates begins his study with just such an examination, tracing the African American figure of the "Signifying Monkey" to the African-derived figure of Esu-Elegbara[22] that appears in black folklore of Haiti, Cuba, and Brazil. Gates calls the recurrence of these figures a topos, "related parts of a larger, unified figure" (5). Though Gates focuses on a specific iteration of this topos, his study opens the way for consideration of the larger figure, or of the relations between the various topoi.

Further, the recent transatlantic turn in critical African American Studies, marked by such signposts as Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1992) and Brent Hayes Edwards *The Practice of Diaspora* (2003), makes such an intervention necessary. As critics have increasingly recognized the transnational nature of African American cultural production and critique, the impetus for situating literary texts by African Americans, and the movements that shaped them, within a context of global interconnectedness and exchange has become more pressing.

Moreira's comparative study of Locke, Carpentier, and Andrade can be seen, in part, as a response to this impetus, as can Jennifer Wilks' work with comparative black modernisms. Christopher Winks' provocative (and, in the case of the United States, somewhat counterintuitive) assertion that "an African presence in literature… can indeed be said to be always already Baroque," can be seen, too, as part of another recent development, explored in the Introduction of this study, towards an understanding of the neobaroque as a global mode of expression. This greater emphasis on the global, transnational nature of the neobaroque has led Patricia Yaeger, in a special issue of

[22] Gates explains that he chooses the Nigerian name, Esu-Elegbara, for the figure which appears in Benin as Legba, in Brazil as Exú, in Cuba as Echu-Elegua, in Haiti as Papa Legba, and in United States as Papa La Bas (5).

PMLA dedicated to New World Baroque theories, to insist that scholars examining non-Latin-American texts "need to toy with the neobaroque" (14).

Michael Feith has outlined what he calls a "Blueprint for Studies in the African American (Neo)Baroque" (2009). Extrapolating from Angela Ndalianis' (2006) and Omar Calabrese's (1987) studies of neobaroque tendencies in contemporary mass media and his own observations of baroque tropes (the mirror, doubles, the bubble and the rainbow) and techniques (especially parody) in novels by John Edgar Wideman and Percival Everett, Feith forcefully ties the Duboisian concept of double-consciousness to Sarduy's notion of the double-centered ellipse, and argues that these novels are better viewed as neobaroque texts than postmodern ones. Feith sees the neobaroque and the postmodern as "overlapping sets, with a large intersection, but areas of undetermined size on either side, which would represent the postmodern that does not use baroque forms, and the neo-baroque that escapes the postmodern, potentially allowing us to reinterpret it in novel ways" (Feith).

In several respects, this study will follow Feith's blueprint, although—as outlined in our Introduction—rather than seeing the Neobaroque as a parallel to postmodernism, we will, with Monika Kaup, read it as an alternative modernism. Like Feith's understanding of the Neobaroque, such a reading can explain neobaroque critiques of modernist modes of thought while simultaneously allowing for consideration of neobaroque characteristics in texts that pre-date postmodernism, like Johnson's.[23]

[23] Feith seems to intend his studies in the "African American (Neo)baroque" to pertain chiefly to contemporary African American literature. It is my intention, in this study, to show that many of the characteristics Feith traces in Wideman and Everett appear in African American literature before than the second half of the 20th Century.

Like Feith, however, I will lean heavily on Gates' theory of African American literature, particularly his notion that the black literary tradition in the US is characterized by "Signifying," which Feith sees as a baroque emphasis on representation. Indeed, the similarities between the characteristics of African American literature and the Neobaroque as defined by critics in Latin American studies are striking: Gates calls "Signifying" "repetition and revision, or repetition with a signal difference" (xxiv), and writes that its signal modes are parody and pastiche, and that its chief characteristics include self-consciousness, an emphasis on performance, and intertextuality. This description dovetails strikingly with both Sarduy's and Carpentier's ideas about baroque expressions in the Americas.

I will also draw upon Feith's discussion of the many and extensive connections that exist between African American authors and the Latin American and Caribbean authors that have traditionally been understood as neobaroque, and his emphasis on those connections—rather than the barriers that divide African-influenced cultures in the Americas. Feith writes:

> Even though writers like [Toni] Morrison or Wideman, for example, have no historical connection with the Caribbean, they have read West Indian authors and appropriated some of their literary strategies. Morrison has incorporated into her work the 'magic realism' of Gabriel García Márquez (Colombia) and Alejo Carpentier (Cuba), to the point of setting one of her novels, *Tar Baby*, in an imaginary island named l'Isle des Chevaliers. Wideman gets quite close to it in *The Cattle Killing*, when he deals in prophecies and the reincarnation of 'certain passionate African spirits'

> who ‘achieve a kind of immortality through serial inhabitation of mortal bodies, passing from one to another, using them up, discarding them, finding a new host’ (15). As Eye, the protagonist, meets several women who might be only one and the same woman, he becomes part of a narrative ‘that presents extraordinary occurrences as an ordinary part of everyday reality’ and, like Carpentier’s and Morrison’s, stage an epistemological conflation between Western notions of reality and literary realism, and ‘the residual influence of the belief systems of the African American slaves’ (Bowers 131/93) (Feith)

1.1.5 TransLatin Johnson

Though Morrison and Wideman may have no historical connection to the Caribbean, Johnson certainly does, and he highlighted those connections throughout his writings. As Amanda Page notes, Johnson begins his autobiography, *Along This Way*, by tracing his trans-Caribbean heritage from his Haitian great-grandmother to his Bahamian grandfather. New World Baroque theory is an especially useful lens for reading the work of Johnson, which is bound at almost every stage to its author’s interest in, connections with, and experiences in Latin America and the Caribbean. Johnson was born in Jacksonville, Florida, a tri-cultural society where the Cuban immigrant community, centered in the city’s cigar factories and hotels, provided a counterbalance to the binary black and white racial divide that characterizes the predominant North American notion of race. According to Johnson’s autobiography *Along this Way*, his best friend worked in

a cigar factory and his father, who worked in one of the city's large hotels, knew Spanish quite well and frequently interacted with Cubans and Cuban-Americans.

A fictionalized version of this setting would appear early in *The Autobiography* when the narrator, finding himself without the funds to pay for his first semester at Atlanta University, travels to Florida to look for work. Arriving in Jacksonville, he stays at a boarding house run by a mixed-race and mixed-nationality couple. The wife is "a rather fine-looking, stout, brown-skin woman of about forty years of age." Of the husband, a "light-coloured Cuban" (67) who waxes poetic on the subject of Cuba's independence, the narrator says:

> He was an exile from the island, and a prominent member of the Jacksonville Junta. Every week sums of money were collected from juntas all over the country. This money went to buy arms and ammunition for the insurgents. As the man sat there nervously smoking his long, 'green' cigar, and telling me of the Gómezes, both the white one and the black one, of Macéo [*sic*] and Bandera, he grew positively eloquent. (71)

Amanda M. Page notes that "[b]y presenting heroes of black ancestry and emphasizing the interracial alliances of revolutionaries in the fight against Spanish imperialism, the exile reveals an entirely different concept of race outside the U.S. context" (29). This foreign, fluid, non-binary concept of race dominates the section. As Johnson becomes acquainted with his fellow boarders, he only learns later that two of them are fellow African Americans, such is the confusion in which he finds himself, unable to tell who is black, who is white, who is American and who is not. *The Autobiography*, of course, is a novel and not an autobiography, but one that takes many autobiographical elements from

Johnson's life. The Jacksonville interlude is one example and, as Page points out, Johnson started his life surrounded by a concept of race that challenged the North American notions that he would work against for his whole life.

Johnson maintained a lifelong relationship with Latin America. He wrote *The Autobiography* while in Nicaragua; later, he wrote extensively about the US occupation in Haiti. Not surprisingly, the Latin American "way" of viewing race repeatedly appears in Johnson's writings as a foil or contrast to US racial constructions. In *Along This Way*, for example, Johnson writes about the impact Latin American views on race can have even on Southern whites in the US. In a memorable anecdote, Johnson describes a train trip in which he sat unmolested in a segregated train car by allowing the train's white passengers to assume that he was Cuban. Concluding the anecdote, Johnson observes, "In such situations any kind of Negro will do; provided he is not one who is an American citizen" (89).

1.2 "Plácido's Farewell to his Mother": Translatin(g) Johnson

1.2.1 Competing Poetic Visions: Bryant and Johnson

As noted at this chapter's outset, one of the most striking instances of Latin American intrusion on Johnson's *oeuvre* comes with the author's surprising inclusion of "Plácido's Farewell to his Mother" in *The Book of American Negro Poetry*. To fully understand the relevance of the poem to Johnson's literary work, and his own placement of the translation within his aesthetic vision, we will need to first consider it within the context that Johnson gives in the preface to *The Book of American Negro Poetry*. Johnson's foray

into Latin American poetry comes after a section on Paul Laurence Dunbar. "Mention of Dunbar," Johnson writes, "brings up for consideration the fact that, although he is the most outstanding figure in literature among the Aframericans of the United States, he does not stand alone among the Aframericans of the whole Western world" (37).[24] Johnson lists "Plácido and Manzano in Cuba; Vieux and Durand in Haiti, Machado de Assis in Brazil; Leon Laviaux in Martinique," before turning his attention fully to Plácido.

Plácido, Johnson informs his readers, was the pen name for Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés, who was renowned as both a poet and a Cuban revolutionary figure. Plácido was implicated as a leader of the Escalera Conspiracy, an alleged plan for a black uprising in Matanzas, and was executed as a result.[25] Johnson writes, "While Plácido's father was a Negro, his mother was a Spanish white woman, a dancer in one of the Havana theatres" (39). Left at an orphanage at an early age, he briefly knew his father but not his mother. The appeal such a figure would hold for Johnson is obvious, given the themes of bastardy, miscegenation, and parental absence that animate *The Autobiography*

[24] Johnson's use of the term "Aframerican" as a term with which to describe blacks from both the US and Latin America is worth noting, too. In *Along This Way* he gives some background for that decision: "The use of 'Aframerican' in the introductory essay to designate Negroes of either North America, South America, or the West Indies gave some currency in this country to the term as a substitute for 'Negro' or 'colored' or 'Afro-American.' The word was coined, so far as I know, by Sir Harry L. Johnston. It is on all points a good word, but in its use in this country it quickly acquired a slightly derisive sense, a sense due mainly, perhaps, to the stamp put upon it by H.L. Mencken" (375).

[25] Though Johnson questions neither, the existence of an actual conspiracy in the case, and Plácido's participation in it (if it existed), are both matters of historical dispute. Paquette (1988) notes that some interpreters have "doubted its existence, arguing that the government manufactured it to justify a Machiavellian policy of colonial repression" (4). José Buscaglia-Salgado (2003) notes that to this day, historians "disagree as to [Plácido's] participation in the episode." He asks, "Was Plácido a conspirator or a scapegoat?" (222)

of an Ex-Colored Man. Interestingly, both Plácido's poetry and his biography have drawn criticism that echoes that aimed at the perceived message of *The Autobiography*. As early as the late nineteenth-century, Puerto Rican abolitionist Eugenio María de Hostos complained of Plácido: "Like the transition period in which he was born, Plácido was physiologically in transition. He was coming from the African race on his father's side and going toward the Caucasian represented by his mother. He was going from black to white…" (qtd in Buscaglia-Salgado 222). In writing about Plácido, Hostos articulated an early critique of *blanqueamiento* and—strikingly—located the problems of cultural whitening *within Plácido's body*.

Buscaglia-Salgado minces no words in describing Hostos' reaction to Plácido. "Ultimately," he writes, "Hostos tended to despise Plácido and to see his body and his life as symptomatic of what he saw as the terrible sickness of Cuba at the time" (222). That sickness, according to Hostos, was that "the people of Cuba were in the worst condition the enslaved could suffer: they were pleased with their masters" (qtd. in Buscaglia-Salgado 222). Against this criticism, Buscaglia-Salgado insists that Plácido writes in "direct contestation of slavery" (228) and that his work is "profoundly antireductive" in a way that makes it incompatible with notions of white supremacy. In a passage that parallels the racial dynamic that, I argue, characterizes much of Johnson's writing, Buscaglia-Salgado describes Plácido's vision thus:

> The national would be forged and undone according to two fundamental movements. On the one hand, like Plácido, the mulatto would curse what he seemed to adulate: the Ideal, or what Plácido called man. On the other hand, the [white] creole would attempt to keep those whom Plácido

> sarcastically described as irrationals from enjoying the rights of nationality and the privileges of power. It would be in this permanent trial of wills, and not in the moment of transition that Hostos perceived in Plácido, that the possibilities of Caribbean emancipation would be at stake. (230)

In Plácido, Johnson found a figure worthy of recuperation from charges of racial and national treason. At the same time, Buscaglia-Salgado reminds us that Plácido's form of resistance involved triangulation, and Johnson's recuperation of the Cuban would, too: if Johnson's translation of "Despedida a mi madre" contests a "treasonous" reading of Plácido, it also contests what we might call a Romantic, "great man" reading of the poet as a martyr for liberty.

Plácido wrote "Despedida a mi madre" in the hours before he faced a Spanish firing squad. Johnson, as he informs his readers, was not the first American to translate the sonnet: that honor belongs to Bryant. Again, Johnson includes Bryant's translation next to his, along with Plácido's original Spanish, inviting comparison between the three texts. The most obvious change Johnson makes is restoring the poem's first word, "If." On the one hand, this is a simple matter of faithfulness to the original, which is how Johnson frames his re-translation in the preface. Bryant, he argues, "totally misses the intimate sense of the delicate subtlety of the poem" because he either "failed to understand or ignored the opening word, 'If,' because he was not familiar with the poet's history" (38). As a result, "The American poet makes it a tender and loving farewell of a son who is about to die to a heart-broken mother; but that is not the kind of a farewell that Plácido intended to write or did write" (38). Instead, Johnson's version, paraphrased, reads "*If* you're thinking of me now, unknown mother, weep not." In other words,

Johnson reconnects the poem to the poet's biography, and thereby to the poet's doubt that his mother would in fact be thinking about him at that moment. Thus Johnson restores the poem's ambiguity (does the mother shed a tear for the son?) and reveals the bitter irony in Plácido's comparison of his last words to the glorious innocence of an infant's cry.

On the other hand, Johnson makes some changes that are harder to justify with the Spanish text. For example, in describing the speaker's soul cry, Bryant's rendering ("All glorious and holy, pure, divine, / And innocent, unconscious as the wailing / I uttered on my birth") is more literal than Johnson's ("Tender and sacred, innocent, sincere— / Spontaneous and instinctive as the cry I gave at birth"). By including the Spanish, Johnson allows his readers to see that his translation is, as much as Bryant's, an interpretation. Despite his framing of the translation as a needed correction, Johnson makes it impossible for his readers to look at one or the other as the "correct" version—instead, the translations appear as competing poetic visions.

Johnson also gives his poem a different title: where Bryant literally translates both the title traditionally given to Plácido's sonnet, "Farewell to my Mother," and its parenthetical subtitle ("In the Chapel"), Johnson adds information, including the poet's name: "Plácido's Farewell to His Mother," he calls it, with the parenthetical subtitle "Written in the Chapel of the Hospital de Santa Cristina on the Night Before His Execution."

After Johnson's title and his restoration of the poem's first word, the next most striking change is his simplification of Bryant's language. "Cease thy mortal weeping" in Bryant becomes "weep not" in Johnson; "wailing" becomes a "cry;" and "I uttered on my birth" becomes "I gave at birth." Plácido's line "Ya el cuello inclino" (literally, *now I*

lean/bend my neck) is rendered by Bryant as "and I resign / Even now, my life, even now descending slowly." Johnson translates it as "and now the hour is hear."

Also, in Johnson's version, the speaker addresses God directly in line 13: "O God, thy mantle of mercy o'er my sins!" The combination of direct address to God and biblical English, when paired with the simplified language throughout most of the poem, recalls both the spirituals Johnson would collect in *The Book of American Negro Spirituals*, and Johnson's writing in *God's Trombones*. The first sermon in the latter book begins "O Lord, we come this morning / knee-bowed and body-bent / before thy throne of grace" (13). In its preface, Johnson writes of the black preachers on whom he modeled his "sermons":

> They were all saturated with the sublime phraseology of the Hebrew prophets and steeped in the idioms of King James English, so when they preached and warmed to their work they spoke another language, a language far removed from traditional Negro dialect. It was really a fusion of Negro idioms with Bible English; and in this there may have been, after all, some kinship with the innate grandiloquence of their old African tongues. (9)

Finally, Johnson and Bryant interpret very differently the final sound, the "postrer sonido" of the speaker's lyre. For Bryant, it is a "A strain of joy and gladness, free, unfailing / All glorious and holy, pure, divine;" for Johnson, in contrast, it is "A note scarce more than a burden-easing sigh, / tender and sacred, innocent, sincere."

1.2.2 Johnson's Baroque Plácido

These changes have two general effects: first, Johnson deflates what might be called the Romantic pomp of Bryant's version. Bryant presents Plácido in the mold of a "great man," emphasizing his personal heroism ("my years of strife," "In blood and terror goes my spirit's life," "I fall for right") and his soaring passion ("thoughts of thee are sweeping"). Bryant's version of the poem reflects very much the influence of Wordsworth's idea of poetry as the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," and the Romantics' emphasis on individual subjectivity. Johnson, in contrast, not only uses simpler language, but also de-emphasizes his subject's emotions ("I calmly go to a death"). Where Bryant's speaker tells of his "years of strife," suggesting a heroic, revolutionary struggle, Johnson's speaks instead of his "history of grief." Though his language is plainer, in a certain sense Johnson's speaker's words are more complicated, expressing an existential question submerged in the poem's (recovered) bitter irony.

If Johnson moves away from Bryant's Romanticism, he replaces it with a recovered *barroquismo*.[26] The instability that Johnson (re)inserts with the poem's first word is a hallmark of the Baroque, as is the dark humor with which he replaces Bryant's sentimentality, as is the reconciliation of opposites that Johnson interjects by calling the lyre's note "tender and sacred"—thus connecting ineffable mystery to the mundane intimacies of mother and baby. The move away from "great man" subjectivity is a Baroque one, too: as René Wellek reminds us, "Subjectivism and baroque rarely go hand

[26] In Latin American criticism, Plácido is generally classified as one of Cuba's Romantic poets though, as Rafael Rojas notes, one who was disparaged by Del Monte for the 'false' and 'mimetic' nature of his poetry and one who has, traditionally, been lumped in with a line of Cuban writers (including Rubalcava, Casal, Poveda, Florit, and Piñera) characterized by their "nihilism," "artificiality," and "rarity" ("Canonical Banquets" XX). Again, though, the emphasis in this study is less on Plácido's poetry itself than on the aesthetics that Johnson reads into it.

in hand. Góngora, though an extremely individual writer, did not therefore in any way become subjective: rather his most characteristic writing became almost symbolistic, 'absolute' poetry which could be welcomed and praised by Mallarmé" (107).[27]

In deflating the poem's rhetoric, Johnson participates in the Baroque's nature as an "art of dethronement and dispute" (Sarduy 290). Though his treatment of Plácido, in both his translation and his preface, is entirely positive, he nonetheless removes the heroic aura that Bryant gives the Cuban. One way Johnson accomplishes this—literally de-legitimizing Plácido—is by reminding his readers, in multiple ways, of Plácido's biography. Whereas Bryant's speaker could be any heroic revolutionary bidding his mother farewell, Johnson ties the poem to a specific person: an illegitimate, motherless child.

1.2.3 Johnson's Blues Plácido

Johnson's use of the poet's biography contributes to the other chief effect of his revision of the sonnet: the recovery of its racial character.[28] As in *The Autobiography*, illegitimacy is tied to miscegenation in the figure of the speaker. Though the poet's mixed-race background remains unstated in the poem, it is made explicit in Johnson's preface, and intimated within the text through several racial markers (which we examine

[27] Zamora and Kaup, echoing Wellek, tie this de-emphasis of individual subjectivity to the Neobaroque modernist projects of Borges and Eliot. They write, "the different nature of Baroque originality—the brilliant engagement (and influencing) of one's precursors rather than the projection of idiosyncratic genius—was attractive to both Eliot and Borges as they worked to separate themselves from the Romantic poetry of personal emotion and to (re)establish a formalist poetics" (6).

[28] This is another area where what Johnson reads into the poem is, for our purposes, more important than what may or may not be there. Rojas notes that Plácido, along with the early-twentieth-century poet José Manuel Poveda, has been subjected to "unfavorable critiques" for "being mulatto poets who resist, stylistically, the ontology of mixed race."

below). Bryant's version, on the other hand, conceals the poet's race. The distance between the two translations provides another response to Washington's argument, stated earlier in this chapter, that Johnson's writing advocates a "race-blind" nationalism. It is Bryant's version, not Johnson's, that renders race invisible and that makes Plácido's words conform to the European aesthetic ideals.

The contrast is clearest in the two poets' treatment of music, represented by the "final sound" from the speaker's lyre. In Bryant, again, it is "a strain of joy and gladness;" but for Johnson the same sound expresses the "fundamental sense of life" that Albert Murray ascribes to an African American music form, the blues. Murray writes:

> The blues lyrics reflect that which they confront, of course, which includes the absurd, the unfortunate, and the catastrophic; but they also reflect the person making the confrontation, his self-control, his sense of structure and style; and they express, among other things, his sense of humor as well as his ambiguity and his sense of possibility. Thus the very existence of the blues tradition is irrefutable evidence that those who evolved it respond to the vicissitudes of the human condition not with hysterics and desperation, but through the wisdom of poetry informed by pragmatic insight. (208-9)

Johnson marks the blues nature of his translation in various ways: in his reference to the speaker's "history of grief," for example, and in his use of the trope of the motherless child. The ramblin' man is another blues trope that Johnson recalls with his decision to restore Plácido's reference to himself as "El peregrino," which Bryant omits ("the pilgrimage begins," Johnson's version ends). Line 13, mentioned above, evokes not only

African American spirituals (and *God's Trombones*), but also numerous lines in classic blues songs that cry out, similarly, for God's mercy.[29] Most strikingly, the line "a note scarce more than a burden-easing sigh" echoes not only the blues but also blues poets—most notably Johnson's acquaintance, Langston Hughes. In fact, Johnson's version of Plácido's sonnet creates an interesting, if perhaps unintentional, counterpoint with Hughes' "Mother to Son" (1922), which was written around the same time. Where Bryant puts Plácido's poetry in conversation with revolutionary heroes of the late 18th and early 19th Centuries, Johnson brings the Cuban into an entirely different set of dialogues: with anonymous blues singers and modern blues poets of the early 20th Century.

Johnson's translation, then, provides another illustration of Edwards' argument that music, as metaphor, is a "necessary mediating element" in Johnson's writing. What makes "Plácido's Farewell to His Mother" striking is the fact that, in it, Johnson finds his metaphors at work in a Latin American text—that he seems to see them operating as much through Plácido's lyre as through James P. Johnson's stride piano. Though it is just part of an appendix in *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, "Plácido's Farewell to His Mother" is not a marginal text within Johnson's *oeuvre*. Instead, as we have seen, it is deeply connected to both the themes and the techniques that animate all of Johnson's writing.[30] In its exploration of the meanings and implications of bastardy and

[29] The first verse of Robert Johnson's "Crossroad Blues," to cite one famous example, ends with the line "Asked the Lord above, 'Have mercy, now save poor Bob if you please.'"

[30] Underscoring the importance of Johnson's work with Plácido to his overall project, an excerpt of his preface to *The Book of American Negro Poetry* consisting entirely of his opinions on Latin American literature, as well as "Plácido's Farewell to His Mother,"

miscegenation, it recalls *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. Its dark humor, too, evokes that novel's narrator's "savage and diabolical desire to gather up all the little tragedies of my life, and turn them into a practical joke on society." The poem's blending of high and low linguistic elements looks forward to Johnson's work in *God's Trombones*. Further, Johnson's positioning of his translation alongside Bryant's version and Plácido's original Spanish means that he meant "Plácido's Farewell to His Mother" to serve as an articulation of an aesthetic vision. Specifically, Johnson uses his translation to critique both Bryant's Romanticism and his erasure of the poem's blackness. In doing so, Johnson aligns his aesthetics with an alternative current in Latin American expression, a current that, in this study, I call the New World baroque.

1.3 *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1): Literature's Big Meeting

1.3.1 Canonicity and the Black Baroque

Another way of framing Johnson's use of "Plácido's Farewell to His Mother" is to discuss it in relation to *The Book of American Negro Poetry*'s larger goal: a wholesale reconsideration and reformulation of the American literary canon.[31] "The greatness of a race may be measured by the literature it has produced," Johnson wrote in 1918 ("When is a Race Great?" 267). In her work on comparative black modernisms, Jennifer Wilks

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Bryant's version, and Plácido's original appeared before the book's publication in *The Crisis* (23): 1921, 109-11.

[31] In this instance, I take advantage of the ambiguity inherent in the term "American." Johnson's foremost concern in publishing his anthology, obviously, was the situation of blacks in the United States. But his writings also show that he had an eye to the "universal" and the international place of the black diaspora, and in his Preface he makes several statements meant to be read on a hemispheric level.

sees precisely these stakes at work in the ways writers in the Harlem Renaissance and the Caribbean Negritude movement (and their later literary descendants) constructed alternative modernisms. "To declare modernity the province of African American and Caribbean peoples," she writes, "is to assert the role of formerly captive, enslaved, and silenced voices and bodies in the formation of the brave New World" (6). Specifically, she argues that the writers she studies built a response to modernity by challenging the notion of a "rupture" between past and future: "to many Anglo American and European modernists," she says, "the constitutive break of modernity was one from 'occidental rationality,' not from the 'racial terror' that was its historical siblings" (5). Black modernisms, she argues, reach into the past, bringing that racial terror back to the forefront of cultural consideration. She writes:

> To 'make it new' in modernist-era African American and Caribbean cultural production meant to negotiate both occidental rationality, from which Anglo and European writers declared their artistic independence, as well as the racial terror it produced, rationalized and institutionalized. Such negotiations entailed not merely associations of individual, self-fashioned identities that recall the figure of 'the solitary modernist' but also articulations of archetypal blackness that borrowed from earlier eras and embodied an enterprise usually considered anathema to modernist art: the consolidation of group identities. (14)

As we will see in the following pages, Johnson's novel *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* reflects this alternative impetus to "make it new," including the complicated negotiations Wilks identifies. This strange novel has a strange history:

written by Johnson in Nicaragua, it was originally published anonymously in 1912 and received by reviewers and the public as an autobiography. Though Johnson was publically acknowledging his authorship (and the fictional nature) of the text by 1915, it wasn't until the novel's second edition appeared in 1927 that his name appeared on the book itself.[32] The confusion surrounding the text did not result solely from the quirky "practical joke" of its publication; instead, the text of the novel itself introduces a measure of opacity into its interpretation, a critical distance between its apparent influences and the author's relationship to those influences. *The Autobiography* is a literary mish-mash, borrowing from a variety of genres, including African American slave narratives and the picaresque. In various ways, it engages the whole of US and large swaths of world literary history, and thus has to be read, like Johnson's *Book of American Negro Poetry*, as a commentary on aesthetics, the canon, and the place of black voices within that canon. As we will see in the following pages, this is especially true of the novel's "Big Meeting" episode.

Before turning to that section, though, I want to note that Wilks' notion of an alternative black modernism parallels Kaup's explication of the political uses of the baroque in the New World. Kaup cites Irlemar Chiampi, who called the Latin American baroque an alternative, or dissonant, modernity, and she notes that understanding modern

[32] In "Stranger than Fiction," a *New York Age* editorial from December 23rd, 1915, Johnson muses on the critical reception of his novel/pseudo-autobiography. Southern reviewers, he writes, refused to see the work as a "human document," insisting that the narrator's act of passing would be impossible to pull off in real life. Northern reviewers, he says, generally accepted the veracity of the text, though "a few of the Northern reviewers were in doubt as to whether the book was fact or fiction" (258). The smirking tone of the editorial supports the notion that Johnson saw the publication of the novel as a sort of social experiment, or even as a "practical joke on society," which is what his narrator calls the work on the novel's first page.

Latin America is impossible from a Euro-centric perspective that holds an "absolute opposition between the traditional and the modern in the grand narrative of European 'development'" (7). The recovery of seventeenth-century aesthetics in the twentieth century, says Kaup, is a means for breaking down that opposition and challenging that "transition" narrative. For Kaup, this dragging of the past into the present is not necessarily related to the "racial terror" that Wilks locates at the heart of black modernism(s), but nor is it wholly unrelated. In Cuba, for example, the New World Baroque cannot be read apart from the nation's racial history. Indeed, Lezama's decision to locate New World *barroquismo* in work of the *mestizo* architect Kondori and, especially, in the very body of Aleijadinho challenges the idea that the New World Baroque can be de-racialized, or read as a race-blind phenomenon.

Of course, parallelism is not the same as equivalence, and the fact that African American and Latin American responses to modernity share some characteristics does not mean that they are the same. Wilks points to Brent Hayes Edwards' theory of *décalage*, "the difference or disjunction that underscores relations across the African diaspora" (94), a notion which seems to underscore Gates' careful assertions of the cultural specificity of his theory of "Signifyin(g)". Such caution undergirds attempts to study cultural overlaps and parallels from a Latin Americanist perspective, as well. Vera Kutzinski, exploring Langston Hughes' translations of Nicolás Guillén, warns against presuming "misleading degrees of likeness (and of equality) among local diasporic constituents" ("Fearful Asymmetries" 113). She argues that such presumptions—a risk of comparative projects like this one—too often render invisible the specifics of one of the

cultures being compared. Most often, she continues, the culture erased is the less powerful of the two.[33]

Against these concerns, Paul Gilroy's notion of a "Black Atlantic" offers a model for thinking of black diasporic cultures as contiguous without eliding their differences, recognizing how texts, ideas, and cultural expressions spread through overlapping "routes" of black identity. Wilks builds on Gilroy's model to depict an "alternative modernism" as a point of comparison between Harlem Renaissance writers (Marita Bonner, Dorothy West) and black Caribbean writers from the era of the Negritude movement (Suzanne Césaire and Suzanne Lacascade), as well as two writers from much later (Maryse Condé and Toni Morrison). Wilks does not call these writers or their alternative modernisms "baroque," though she does refer frequently to Édouard Glissant, a Caribbean writer who explicitly linked his writing to North American cultural production, as in his book-length tour of the South, *Faulkner, Mississippi* (1996), and in his comparison of his own writing to the jazz trumpet of Miles Davis. Glissant also calls his work baroque, defining that term in precisely the way Wilks describes the African American and Caribbean alternative modernisms of the writers she studies: "a reaction

[33] Kutzinski is most concerned with projects that, she says, "[draw] patterns of cultural influence that spread in one direction only: from north to south" (114). Even in the field of African American studies, she argues, there is a tendency to assume that black authors in the US disseminated notions of literary blackness throughout the diaspora. In "Fearful Asymmetries," she tries to invert that assumption, examining how Langston Hughes' contact with Latin America affected his own views of race, nation, and aesthetics. This project is in line with that one, and with the one Marilyn Miller proposes in "(Gypsy) Rhythm and (Cuban) Blues." While I do explore the effects of African American notions of blackness on Cuban identity formation, particularly on the (white) Cuban author Alejo Carpentier (see Chapter 2), I am also concerned with the *other* end of the continuum, and with Latin America's traces in the works of African American authors.

against the rationalist pretense of penetrating the mysteries of the known with one uniform and conclusive move" (624).

For Glissant, "baroque" is a capacious concept and, further, an "expanding" one, which is "spreading into the world" through the sorts of contacts represented in Johnson's biography (and explored in Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*). It is more of a way of being in the world, a relation, than a historical style limited to the artistic expressions of the Counter-Reformation. The historic Baroque, he continues, "prefigured, in an astonishingly prophetic manner, present-day upheavals of the world" (624). One of those upheavals is the end of slavery in the Americas, and the struggles of black subjects in the US to confront white supremacist notions of national identity. Through Glissant, then, we can further see why New World baroque theory offers a particularly useful lens for examining certain elements of the African American experience. The baroque, in this capacious, expanding sense, can serve as a name for the points of comparison that Wilks finds between the disparate authors of her study: each of them reflects in her work the relation of a minority subject to power, to privilege, and to history that Glissant calls baroque, and in which Lezama sees the subversiveness of New World baroque expressions.

1.3.2 Making Songs: Singing Johnson and John Brown's Body *as* Canon

This relation—of modernism to its alternatives, of a canon to its others—is particularly central to the "Big Meeting" episode of *The Autobiography*. If *The Autobiography* is a book about books, then the "Big Meeting" episode is where Johnson is most clearly concerned with a theory of canon formation. As is often the case with

Johnson, the resulting understanding has to be filtered through the lens of music. At that point in the novel the narrator has re-embraced his childhood ambition of composing great works on African American themes after watching a German musician in Berlin taking ragtime chords "through every known musical theme." The narrator says:

> I made up my mind to go back into the very heart of the South, to live among the people, and drink in my inspiration firsthand. I gloated over the immense amount of material I had to work with, not only modern rag-time, but also the old slave songs—material which no one had yet touched. (143)

The narrator intends to add his name and thereby his race to music's canon, proving that African American themes can support composition of universal appeal and unimpeachable quality. He thus reflects a notion of the relationship between black music and the canon current in "canonical" modernism. That is, the narrator's vision of the canon reflects the imperative to "make it new" or, as Jorge Luis Borges framed it, a sense of modernism as "permanent rupture" that was nonetheless an extension of Enlightenment and Romantic ideals. Within this canonical vision of modernism, African American elements serve the role that Czech folk elements served in Smetana's *Moldau*. These folk elements *feed* (or, put differently, are consumed by) the composer, providing the sustenance, but not the creative spark, that he needs in order to make music new.[34] Along with this notion comes a vision of the artist as "great man" (or, as Wilks puts it,

[34] I use the terms "he," "his" and "great man" here purposefully since, as Wilks points out, the canonical notion of modernist (as well as Enlightenment and Romantic) genius was extremely gendered.

"the solitary modernist"), recollecting inspiration in tranquility and, by the force of his personality, turning that inspiration into music of universal appeal.[35]

Here again, though, we enter into the debate between Salim Washington and Gordon E. Thompson on the degree of concordance, or harmony, we should find between Johnson's views and his narrator's. The language of the passage cited above (the narrator "gloated," for example) and the narrator's presumption to claim for his own the material of a culture in which he has never lived for long, signals that Johnson may be treating his narrator's views ironically. And this impression is strengthened in the novel's "Big Meeting" episode, in which the narrator confronts a strikingly different notion of artistic creation and canonization.

Johnson's narrator describes the "big meeting" thus:

> 'Big meeting' is an institution something like camp-meeting, the difference being that it is held in a permanent church, and not in a temporary structure. All the churches of some one denomination—of course, either Methodist or Baptist—in a county, or perhaps, in several adjoining counties, are closed, and the congregations unite at some centrally located church for a series of meetings lasting a week. (173)

[35] This vision of artistic creation, interestingly, appears regularly in the writings of Alejo Carpentier. Where Johnson's narrator attempted to add the folk music of black America to the canon, Carpentier was interested in universalizing Cuban music forms. When Carpentier envisioned the process that would lead to this universalization, he frequently used African American music as a model because, "El negro norteamericano en este siglo" he said in 1952, "ha universalizado sus expresiones artísticas" ("Porgy and Bess" 109). In fact, writing about contemporary classical music ("música culta"), Carpentier often made Johnson's narrator seem prophetic of the direction that such music would take in the first half of the 20th Century. We will explore this comparison in depth in Chapters 2 and 3.

Johnson calls it both a social and a religious phenomenon, and he provides vivid descriptions of the clothing and behavior of its attendants. Johnson also uses the "big meeting" to introduce the characters John Brown and Singing Johnson, who are notable for the fact that they are historical personages—the only non-fictional characters in the text.

John Brown is the meeting's leading preacher; Singing Johnson is its musical leader. In the character of Singing Johnson, Johnson presents an alternative notion of the artist at odds with the narrator's Romantic ideal: rather than a composer of monumental pieces, Singing Johnson is "a leader of singing, a maker of songs, a man who could improvise at the moment lines to fit the occasion" (178). Johnson stresses his "memory and ingenuity," and his immense knowledge of the body of African American religious music. On the one hand, Johnson depicts Singing Johnson along familiar Romantic lines: he is an exceptional talent who works passionately with little hope of remuneration. "All of his leisure time," Johnson writes, "he devoted to originating new words and melodies and new lines for old songs" (180). On the other hand, Singing Johnson's improvisatory talent is for bricolage and pastiche; while his work entails creating something "new," that newness comes through the recycling and repurposing of melodies and words for new occasions. In that sense, his work foretells the Neobaroque—and jazz—tendency to make texts of composites of previous texts, by which, in Roberto González Echevarría's words, "the original is forgotten, deformed, by means of the new amalgam" (*Pilgrim* 267). Further, Singing Johnson's work is firmly rooted to his community. It not only builds from the body of songs available to his African American public, it also depends on their participation, and its success hinges on his connection with his audience. Singing Johnson

thus illustrates a notion of greatness based on community, rather than individual genius; improvisation, rather than careful composition; performativity; and a re-envisioning of originality as based on the use and re-use of texts rather than the creation of new texts out of whole cloth. Furthermore, Singing Johnson's canonicity is one in which African American expression is fundamental, not marginalized. In short, if Singing Johnson represents a vision of artistic genius, it is a vision replicated as much in Duke Ellington as in Bedrich Smetana or Antonín Dvořák.

The visions of artistic genius, achievement, and canonicity that the narrator encounters in Singing Johnson are thus at odds with the ones he holds before attending the "big meeting."[36] As Washington points out, when Johnson is talking about music he is often talking about culture in general, and music tends to stand in particular in Johnson's work for literature. In that light, Singing Johnson and his challenge to the narrator's vision of the musical canon serve as a sort of metaphor, one fleshed out and supported by Johnson's depiction of Singing Johnson's preaching counterpart, John Brown. Johnson describes Brown thus:

> John Brown was a jet-black man of medium size, with a strikingly intelligent head and face, and a voice like an organ peal. He preached each night after several lesser lights had successively held the pulpit during an

[36] This leads to an interesting possible reading of the events that follow. The narrator's attendance of the "big meeting" represents his deepest moment of engagement with the African American music forms he has set out to find; it ought to, then, present the narrator with the inspiration he seeks to convert into a lasting musical achievement. Instead, the episode is immediately followed by the novel's lynching scene, in which narrator witnesses horrific racialized terror and claims to be so ashamed of his race thereafter that he decides to abandon his project and live as a white man. As Thompson reminds us, though, the narrator has never been particularly reliable; an alternative reading of his abandonment of his ambitions suggests that his experience at the "big meeting" has *already* rendered his project untenable.

> hour or so. As far as subject-matter is concerned, all of the sermons were alike: each began with the fall of man, ran through various trials and tribulations of the Hebrew children, on to the redemption by Christ, and ended with a fervid picture of the judgment day and the fate of the damned. But John Brown possessed magnetism and an imagination so free and daring that he was able to carry through what the other preachers would not attempt. He knew all the arts and tricks of oratory, the modulation of the voice to almost a whisper, the pause for effect, the rise through light, rapid-fire sentences to the terrific, thundering outburst of an electrifying climax. In addition, he had the intuition of a born theatrical manager. (175)

In both his knowledge of Scripture and his nightly re-enactment of biblical narratives, John Brown embodies "the canon" in its original, religious sense. In a more general, artistic sense, Brown, like Singing Johnson, presents an image of genius that is performative, community- and repertoire-based, and oral.

The name "John Brown" is also polyvalent: besides being the actual name of a preacher Johnson watched as a young man, the name also evokes the nineteenth-century abolitionist captured and hanged for leading anti-slavery insurrections in Kansas and Virginia.[37] The name thus performs the function Wilks ascribes to black American

[37] In fact, "John Brown" is such a common name that its significations seem to multiply endlessly. George Kimball (1890) wrote that the song "John Brown's Body" originated from members of the 2nd Massachusetts Infantry Battalion, who liked to play on the identification of a beloved Sergeant in their company, John Brown, with the hanged abolitionist. On top of that, there is the significance of the color brown and its association with African American skin tones. In this sense, John Brown can be read as a sort of black "John Doe," an African American everyman.

modernisms: it recalls the racial terror that accompanied the nation's founding and first century of development, and reminds readers that what Johnson calls "the race question" has long divided the nation. Gilroy says that, too often, narratives of modernity ignore slavery, treating it as either the "special property" of blacks rather than of society as a whole, or as a "premodern residue" that disappears as Western society progresses; Johnson's use of the name John Brown, in a section that precedes a lynching scene, refuses to let that happen. Wilks writes that "to question modernity… [o]ne must trade cohesive stories of European expansion for the disruptive complications of conquest" (7). With the name John Brown, Johnson forces his readers to trade cohesive stories of US history for the disruptive complications of African American reality.[38]

This takes on added significance given the relevance of Brown to the US literary canon. As both a symbol and a historical figure, the abolitionist John Brown occupies significant space in the work of Whitman, Thoreau and Emerson, authors largely understood as foundational figures of US literature. The notion of an "American Renaissance" centered on those authors was coalescing in the early years of the 20th Century, and would reach its full expression in Lewis Mumford's *The Golden Day* (1927), which in turn exerted considerable influence on F.O. Matthiesson's *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Whitman and Emerson* (1941). But as

[38] Wilks cites Glissant's embrace of "complication as constitutive and even necessary for American (in the broad hemispheric sense rather than exclusively national one) literary production," and points to his statement, "Il leur [les littératures nationales] faut tout assumer tout d'un coup, le combat, le militantisme, l'enracinement, la lucidité, la méfiance envers soi, l'absolu d'amour, la forme du paysage, le nu des villes, les dépassements et les entêtements" (7). "Complication" would seem to be a guiding principle of Johnson's view of national history as well, along with a dedication to laying bare the nation's struggles, aggressiveness and confrontation (cf. "Perverted History" 156-7).

Alan Nadel outlines, the ideas behind Mumford's *Golden Day* were just the sort of neat narrative of US literary history that Gilroy insists needs to be challenged. Mumford argued that the era of 1830 – 60 represented a particularly glorious period for American literature, full of "representative men," which was brought to an ignoble end by the Civil War. Such a view sidelines questions of race for the sake of a unified national identity; Johnson's use of the name John Brown challenges that sidelining, disrupting the idea that race (or race-related violence) was ever tangential to the United States' national narrative.

Further, just as Singing Johnson's name evokes the musicality of Johnson's own writing, the name John Brown also connects to the folk song "John Brown's Body." The song itself is a polysemous and multivalent signifier, sharing a tune with a "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" and with fight songs for the football teams of a number of southern universities, including the University of Georgia and Auburn University which, of course, were barred to black students at the time. This latter fact is not to be dismissed: Johnson's writing repeatedly shows him to be a student of popular culture, who remarked elsewhere that one of the tunes he wrote with his brother Rosamund was popular at football games (*BANP* 13). The song's movement from abolitionist anthem to Union battle song to the battle song of segregated, Southern universities parallels the narrator's slippage "across enemy lines" in his movement from black to white.

1.3.3 *The Autobiography*'s Borgesian Intertextuality

In several ways, the "Big Meeting" episode (like *The Autobiography* as a whole) is not just a literary text about literary texts, but a literary text *made of* literary texts. The episode brings together multiple genres and discourses, tying together fiction,

autobiography, history, ethnography, ethnomusicology, and music criticism. In the section, Johnson includes lyrics from two hymns, "Swing Low, Sweet Chariots" and "Steal Away, Jesus," and lines from and descriptions of the "sermons" to which he will dedicate *God's Trombones*. As discussed above, texts, discourses and genres meet, too, in the characters Singing Johnson and John Brown, both in their strange placement as non-fictional figures in a fictional (pseudo-nonfictional) text, and in the various resonances evoked by their names.

Most curiously, the "Big Meeting" episode is a text made of Johnson's future texts. The ideas Johnson first presents in these pages will explode, Big-Bang style, through the remainder of his oeuvre, appearing almost word-for-word in his later editorials, in the scholarly prefaces to his anthologies, in his later poetry, and in his actual autobiography, *Along This Way*. The following section on the spirituals, for example, is essentially cut-and-pasted into Johnson's preface for the *Book of American Negro Poetry*:

> How did the men who originated them manage to do it? The sentiments are easily accounted for; they are mostly taken from the Bible; but the melodies, where did they come from? Some of them so weirdly sweet, and others so wonderfully strong. Take, for instance, 'Go Down, Moses.' I doubt that there is a stronger theme in the whole musical literature of the world. (181)

Only punctuation differences distinguish this passage from its later use in *The Book of American Negro Poetry*.[39] Johnson's characterization of the effect of a performance of

[39] In *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, the passage appears as follows: "How did the men who originated these songs manage to do it? The sentiments are easily accounted for; they are, for the most part, taken from the Bible. But the melodies, where did they

"Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" as "a sound like the roll of the sea" will be repeated in *The Book of American Negro Spirituals* (26);[40] the descriptions of Singing Johnson and John Brown appear in both *Along this Way* and the preface to *God's Trombones*; John Brown's line "Young man, your arm's too short to box with God!" starts his poem/sermon in verse "The Prodigal Son" from *God's Trombones*.[41]

It's difficult to know what, exactly, to make of this phenomenon, which might be called an extreme personal intertextuality or, alternatively, an oeuvre-wide intratextuality. It characterizes much of Johnson's writing: the earlier *Autobiography* passage on the centrality of black contributions to Western culture (cited above) appears in different forms in several places throughout his writing. As stated above, Washington sees these repeated passages as evidence of "harmony" between the author's views and his narrator's. Like Gordon Thompson, I find the issue more complicated. Like *Don Quixote* coming from the pen of Borges' character, the twentieth-century Frenchman Pierre Menard, the statesman and scholar's words seem to hold very different meanings when coming from the mouth of a gambler and nightclub musician, whom Thompson notes is an extremely unreliable narrator, and when presented as narrative rather than as ethnomusicology, and when treated as part of a novel disguised as an autobiography rather than as editorial or music criticism, or as poetry. Washington may be right that the

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come from? Some of them are so weirdly sweet, and others so wonderfully strong. Take, for instance, 'Go Down, Moses'; I doubt that there is a stronger theme in the whole musical literature of the world" (17).

[40] Johnson had already used the lines "Let our rejoicing rise / High as the listening skies /Let it resound as the rolling sea" in "Lift Every Voice and Sing" (1899).

[41] A version of the line also appears in Chapter 6 of Ellison's *The Invisible Man*: Bledsoe, expelling the narrator from college for driving the white Mr. Norton to the bar The Golden Day, tells the narrator "Your arms are too short to box with me, son" (111). Even before that, Ellison used the line in his story "Flying Home" (166).

passages on music history and criticism and on US racial dynamics reflect the author's views. And their appearance in *The Autobiography*, in some cases fifteen or twenty years before they appear in other texts, may reflect the persistence of those views. Still, Johnson's *use* of those passages throws a note of dissonance into that supposed harmony, suggesting a playful self-ironization, a critical distance from the author's personal perspective.

1.4 *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (2): Filomeno in Harlem

1.4.1 Baroque play and a Blues joke

The sense of play inherent in the construction of *The Autobiography*'s "Big Meeting" episode echoes throughout the novel, particularly in the author's use of, and references to, music. In *Blues People*, Amiri Baraka outlines the traits of African music that, he argues, survived in African American society, persisted in the blues, and through the blues, permeated jazz.[42] Baraka quotes Borneman's "The Roots of Jazz" (1948):

> In language, the African tradition aims at circumlocution rather than at exact definition. The direct statement is considered crude and unimaginative; the veiling of all contents in ever-changing paraphrases is considered the criterion of intelligence and personality. In music, the same tendency towards obliquity and ellipsis is noticeable: no note is attacked straight; the voice or instrument always approaches it from above or

[42] Baraka, like Baker, insists that the blues is "the parent of all legitimate jazz." For a discussion of the primacy of blues in Black American expression, see the discussion of Marybeth Hamilton in the Introduction of the present study.

> below, plays around the implied pitch without ever remaining any length of time, and departs from it without ever having committed itself to a single meaning. The timbre is veiled and paraphrased by constantly changing vibrato, tremolo and overtone effects. The timing and accentuation, finally, are not *stated*, but *implied* or *suggested*. The denying or withholding of all signposts. (31)

For Baraka, the blues developed from this tendency toward elision: in fact, Baraka sees the standard blues treatment of the third and seventh steps of the diatonic scale as arising from attempts to accommodate the Western diatonic scale with non-Western musical concepts. "The singer," he writes (though he could be referring, too, to the blues instrumentalist), "almost invariably tries to skid or step around these steps with slides, slurs, or vibrato effects so broad as to approach scalar value" (25).

In other words, through Borneman, Baraka draws a parallel between the "blueing" of notes (skidding, or stepping around the notes, in his words) in African-derived music and linguistic ellipsis. This connection of the musical to the linguistic has a long tradition in the criticism of African American literature, one made most clear in Baker's notion of the "blues matrix." In *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature*, Baker repeatedly likens blues performances to written texts, and the music's performers to writers and translators, and vice versa. He writes:

> One way of describing the blues is to claim their amalgam as a code radically conditioning Afro-America's cultural signifying. Such a description implies a prospect in which any aspect of the blues—a guitar's growling vamp or a stanza's sardonic boast of heroically back-breaking

> labor—'stands' in Umberto Eco's words, 'for something else' in virtue of a systematic set of conventional procedures. The materiality of any blues manifestation, such as a guitar's walking bass or a French harp's 'whoop' of motion may be seen, is, one might say, enciphered in ways that enable the material to escape into a named, or coded, blues signification. The material, thus, slips into irreversible difference. (6)

Baker, like Baraka and Gates, compares African American music to African American language in order to explore the meanings of "musical" tendencies in African American literature. Though Baker, Gates and Baraka differ in important ways, all three see "slippage" (whether linguistic or musical) as a political act: an enactment of the so-called double veil and a metaphor for cultural expression that subverts by accommodating, that institutes a fundamental instability into societal order. It was with these types of comparison in mind that, in an earlier section, I described Johnson's translation of Plácido's "Despedida a mi madre" as a blues rendering of the original sonnet. By finding the blues in Plácido's poem, Johnson both racializes the piece and destabilizes its meaning.

A similar argument can be made regarding the influence of African American music on *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. As with Johnson's version of Plácido's sonnet, no subject in *The Autobiography* is attacked directly, and the novel displays a similar refusal to commit itself to a single meaning. In this sense, Gordon Thompson's reading of the *The Autobiography* can be said to be a "blues" reading of the text. Thompson insists that it is only through slippage between the novel's multiple voices—its author's and its narrator's—that "the text as a double-voiced narrative

emerges" (101). Thompson calls attention to the narrator's insistence that his narrative is "a practical joke on society," and he prompts the question of just what, exactly, that joke is, and who, exactly, the joke is on. Thompson argues that, too often, critics have read the novel "straight," taking on faith—and the slim evidence of passages sprinkled throughout the text—the cohesion of the author's and the narrator's views on American music, racial relations, and the connections between the two.[43] Instead, Thompson points out that the narrator's readings of W.E.B. DuBois are far less sophisticated than his author's, that, in fact, they are misreadings that would be preposterous coming from Johnson himself. Thompson even takes aim at the novel's original preface, in which an unnamed group called "The Publishers" wrote that "[i]n these pages it as though a veil had been drawn aside: the reader is given a view of the inner life of the Negro in America, and is initiated into the freemasonry, as it were, of the race" (xii).

Thompson claims, correctly, that "The 'Publishers' attempt to authenticate [the narrator's] expertise regarding black ethnicity ought to be suspect from the start" (104). Again, the novel was originally published anonymously and received as an autobiography, rather than a novel. The revelation that the author was Johnson, a diplomat and race-leader, rather than a college-dropout and nightclub musician, ought indeed to have challenged the "Publisher's" preface. But even Carl Van Vechten, in his preface to the 1927 edition, claims that a precursor to the work is DuBois' *Souls of Black Folk*, and hails Johnson as a careful sociologist, recording the whole of Black American experience. Van Vechten writes:

[43] In particular, Thompson criticizes Salim Washington's view that the novel argues "for a race-blind America" (100).

> *The Autobiography*, of course, in the matter of specific incident, has little enough to do with Mr. Johnson's own life, but it is imbued with personality and feeling, his *views* of the subjects discussed, so that to a person who has no previous knowledge of the author's own history, it reads like *real* autobiography. It would be truer, perhaps, to say that it reads like a composite autobiography of the Negro race in the United States in modern times. (v-vi)

Baker, writing about the blues, says that the singer's "signatory coda is always *atopic*, placeless: 'If anybody ask you who sang this song / Tell 'em X done been here and gone'" (5). Like the blues, in Baker's reading, Johnson's novel is not personalized but instead "an anonymous (nameless) voice issuing from the black (w)hole," a "phylogenetic recapitulation … of species experience" (5). The narrator's name—abbreviated by some commentators as "Ex"—furthers the association. Thompson reminds us, though, that even the novel's self-positioning is not what it seems, is a performance, and Borneman's analysis shows that this instability, too, reflects characteristics of African-derived music.

Other critics have found in *The Autobiography* different elements of African American music. Rather than the blues, Bruce Barnhart (2006) chooses to read *The Autobiography* in terms of the "chronopolitics" of ragtime. He borrows the term chronopolitics from Johannes Fabian, who argues that conceptions of time are inherently political and who, particularly, critiques "allochronism," or the linear, Western, Enlightenment concept of time, which he sees as "a denial of the dialectical relationship between subject and object that divests the object of knowledge (whether person, body,

art form, culture, or race) of the ability to act in and occupy the same temporal space as the observing subject of knowledge" (Barnhart 552).

Barnhart connects Fabian's "chronopolitics" to the interplay of music forms, especially ragtime and classical music, in *The Autobiography*. Classical music, he writes, "stands for a conception of time that revolves around necessity, calculability, and the expected." In contrast, the ragtime that the narrator improvises in New York bars and at the request of his benefactor offers "a repetitive, polyphonic time of entanglement and imbrication," one that is "intimately familiar with the link between force and time." By privileging—or at least giving voice to—ragtime in his novel's musical interactions, Johnson makes clear that link, and thus undermines the authority of allochronic time.

Barnhart does not see in Johnson's novel a replay of the traditional distinction between linear and cyclical time. Instead, he writes:

> The two times operative in Johnson's novel are perhaps best thought of as official and vernacular time. They depend on each other for their constitution; official time a reification of vernacular time, and vernacular time shaping itself in the interstices of official time. Both times emerge out of a specific positionality within a complex of social and economic conditions and practices, not out of any fixed cultural or biological essence. Thus, while classical music is a tradition having its provenance in Europe, and ragtime is a music unimaginable without the forced historical yoking of African subjects and American geography, neither form corresponds absolutely to the racial formations dividing the American polity. Ragtime is a music with a complex provenance, emerging as it did

> out of both an African American performance tradition rife with Africanisms, and out of a cultural situation characterized by an insistent give and take between Euro-American and African American forms and cultural traditions. (553)

Classical music, Barnhart implies, has a similarly complex provenance, arising out of a similarly voracious urge towards incorporating foreign elements, including African and non-Western ones.

Keeping in mind Baker, Gates, Baraka, and Borneman's characteristics of African American expression, then, we can say that the centrality of music in the novel and the author's decision to make his narrator a musician serve as signals of the work's general approach to meaning and representation. But another interesting aspect of Borneman's analysis is how easily these characteristics could, with slight moderations, describe a poem by the sixteenth-century Spanish poet Luis de Góngora. In Borneman's reflections on "the denying or withholding of all signposts," and "ever-changing paraphrases" in which "direct statement is considered crude and unimaginative," it becomes hard not to hear resonances with Sarduy's characterization of Góngora's Baroque as "abundance in the service of a repression" (308). Borneman's description of African-descended music presents an intriguing phenomenon: the ways that we read African American music into Johnson's writings are similar to the ways we can read those texts as baroque.

A return to Michael Feith's "Blueprint for Studies in the African American (Neo)Baroque" further illuminates this convergence. On one level, Feith finds *barroquismo* in Wideman and Everett through a number of baroque tropes that appear frequently in their fiction (the mirror, the bubble, the rainbow). Citing the first pages of

Wideman's *Philadelphia Fire*, for example, in which the narrator asks readers to imagine the city of Philadelphia as if placed within a crystal ball, Feith writes that Wideman is "flirting with the baroque." Similarly, Feith calls "textbook baroque" a scene from Everett's short story "Meiosis" in which the protagonist, Tom, finds himself standing in front of a mirror, which then becomes a drop of water, which then becomes a bubble in which Tom is trapped. "The bubble and the drop," Feith writes, "hint at frailty, transience and transparence, while the mirror redoubles these with uncanny doubts about identity, and the rainbow expresses the variegated wealth and diversity of experience." Feith calls these tropes "the games of being and seeming, surface illusions, simulacra and disguises," and writes that in the baroque "the confusion between being and seeming is inseparable from the topos of the topsy-turvy world: the mask produces reversal and inversion."

The same could be said of *The Autobiography*, which contains extensive mirror/doubling imagery and which pretends to present the variegated wealth of the black experience in the United States. The mirror is an especially potent symbol of destabilized identity in *The Autobiography*, as it is where the narrator turns when his ethnicity is suddenly revealed (to him and his classmates) by a grade-school teacher:

> I rushed up into my own little room, shut the door, and went quickly to where my looking-glass hung on the wall. For an instant I was afraid to look, but when I did, I looked long and earnestly. I had often heard people say to my mother: 'What a pretty boy you have!' I was accustomed to hear remarks about my beauty; but now, for the first time, I became conscious of it and recognized it. I noticed the ivory whiteness of my skin, the beauty

> of my mouth, the size and liquid darkness of my eyes, and how the long, black lashes that fringed and shaded them produced an effect that was strangely fascinating even to me. I noticed the softness and glossiness of my dark hair that fell in waves over my temples, making my forehead appear whiter than it really was. (17)

John Sheehy notes that the novel's central question, the narrator's own choice of his race, is posed in that early scene. "Does a black man gaze into the looking-glass to find a white man looking back?" Sheehy asks. "Or is it the other way around?" He concludes: "Johnson never answers these questions, but never stops asking: the question of verifiable and constant identity is as crucial for the white boy in this scene learning that he is 'black' as it is, later in the novel, for the black man determined to pass as 'white'—and as ambiguous" (401). Throughout the novel, Johnson reinscribes the image of the mirror with characters who serve as doubles—most notably his (white) sister, whom he encounters unexpectedly in at the opera in Paris, and whose beauty provokes in the narrator a fascination that recalls his first contemplation of his own image (133-4).

To these tropes, we could add the image of the spiral (return with variation), a common baroque trope that Acosta ties to the symphonic structure of theme-and-variation. In fact, the novel's plot could be mapped geographically as a spiral around the double centers of New York City and the American South. The first two places mentioned in *The Autobiography* are an unnamed "little town of Georgia" and New York City, where the narrator and his mother stop en route to the town in Connecticut where the narrator is raised. Through the course of the novel, the narrator's expanding travels are always centered on these two poles, to which he always eventually returns.

On another level, as our discussion of Sarduy suggests, the baroque can also be seen in specific techniques, namely substitution, proliferation, and condensation. Of the three, proliferation is most apparent in *The Autobiography*. Proliferation is inherent, in fact, in the novel's very structure, which consists of a variety of experiences (those of a white boy, a black boy, a promising young scholar, a college dropout, a nightclub musician, a musicologist and, finally, a wealthy white businessman) accumulating around the central character, who remains a cipher, unnamed, neither white nor black.[44]

But, as with Baker and the blues, Feith insists that these tropes and techniques point back to a particular relationship between reality and representation. Or, as Glissant puts it, the baroque "asserted not just an art or a style, but went beyond this to produce a being-in-the-world" ("Baroque" 625).[45] For Feith, this relationship is best expressed by baroque art's tendency to rupture its frame through such techniques as *trompe l'oeil*, *mise en abîme*, and *regressus ad infinitum*.[46] Feith writes:

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[44] "It is difficult for me to analyse my feelings concerning my present position in the world," the narrator says. "Sometimes it seems to me that I have never really been a Negro, that I have been only a privileged spectator of their inner life; at other times I feel that I have been a coward, a deserter, and I am possessed by a strange longing for my mother's people" (210).

[45] Ralph Ellison suggests that jazz, too, represents a "way of being in the world." Consider his statement in a 1961 interview with Richard Stern that "jazz was so much a part of our total way of life that it got not only into our attempts at playing classical music but into forms of activities usually not associated with it: into marching and into football games, where it has since become a familiar fixture" ("That Same Pain" 69).

[46] Lois Parkinson Zamora distinguishes among the three techniques in her study *The Inordinate Eye*: "Like trompe l'oeil, [mise en abîme's] primary subject is its own referential status. It, too, invokes infinity, but not through perspectival play or emblematic strategies; rather, it proposes an infinite series of identical, embedded images or texts, one producing the next and nesting within it, *ad infinitum*. We may think of mise en abîme as an abstract trompe l'oeil, because endless self-repetition can only be imagined, never depicted or described. *Regressus ad infinitum* is closely related to mise en abîme in that it, too, proposes an abstract structure of endless self-reflection; the most obvious example is an image reflected in facing mirrors…" (264).

> The central characteristic of the baroque that informs this study is this lack of respect for the limits of the frame. Closed forms are replaced by open structures that favor a dynamic and expanding polycentrism. Stories refuse to be contained within a single structure, expanding their narrative universe into further sequels and serials.

The line between reality and representation disappears; baroque art becomes, in effect, an art without an interior, where representation is all. This is, of course, a way of restating the problem of the *The Autobiography*'s joke: the question of who, exactly, is its target is posed as a result of the work's genre-bending and frame-breaking self-positioning as an autobiography that is a novel, with an anonymous but well-known author.

1.4.2 Góngora, Guillén, and Johnson

"In contemporary black America," Feith writes, "the baroque questioning of the limits between reality and dream/illusion is not only a pleasurable vertigo or an academic conundrum: fictions can have very real and deadly consequences." This is an important reminder of the historic stakes of the "passing" that Johnson's novel depicts; it is also another way of connecting Johnson to the Latin American Baroque, and to José Lezama Lima's assertion that, in the Americas, the baroque became an art of counter-conquest. Beyond that, it can help us connect Johnson, through Lezama, to Góngora, a surprising literary ancestor.

As Lezama traced in some of the earliest formulations of New World Baroque theory, Góngora was taken from the start as a model for Latin American literature. In "Baroque Curiosity," Lezama argues, in fact, that the true legacy of Góngora took root in

the Americas, rather than Spain. "It is in America," Lezama writes, "that the true intentions of Góngora's life and poetry, his crackling and plutonic content colliding with form like a brick wall, reappear…" Lezama is describing in that sentence the work of the seventeenth-century Colombian poet Hernando Domínguez Camargo, but his essay quickly expands to include all of the colonial poetry of the Spanish Americas. And, rather than limiting his reading of Góngora's American influence to questions of style or poetics, he considers what Zamora and Kaup call "the ideological dimensions of the Baroque" ("Editor's Note" 209), finding in American *gongorismo* not just a style but a "complete way of life" ("Baroque Curiosity" 213). Specifically, Lezama frames this cosmovision as tendency towards "enjoyment," and he takes as one example Góngora's nephew, the colonial Mexican polymath Carlos Sigüenza y Góngora, whom he celebrates for his "art of enjoying a landscape and filling it with instruments of metric and voluptuous artifice" (221).

Sigüenza y Góngora represents a bourgeois figure, an emblem of the characteristic American "señor barroco," whom Lezama describes, initially, as a member of the landed *criollo* class. Of this paradigmatic "Baroque gentleman," Lezama writes:

> With his luxurious Dutch spine of Ronsard, his covers spread over the Mantuan swan, his recondite sheets of miscellaneous mischief by Góngora or Polo de Medina, the silvery pearls of Góngora's sonnets and the imprisoned bones of Quevedo's sonnets. Before reclining in leisure, he holds in the elaborate column that is his right hand a cup of *soconusco*, the gift of his strict ecclesiastical upbringing, drinking with Cartesian caution to avoid the unpolished amethyst of gout. Ensconced now in the grand

> concave chair of the *oidor*, he watches the *sans culottes* coming and going in slow waves, gray, true, and eternal. (213-14)

But through the course of the essay, Lezama upends this bourgeois image of the American Baroque, revealing a (hidden) revolutionary potential in this seemingly effete "enjoyment." Notably, he finds this revolutionary potential in racial syncretism. By the end of the essay, his notion of the ideal "señor barroco" has shifted, from Sigúenza y Góngora to two mixed-race South American architects whose work, Lezama argues, surpasses that of their Spanish contemporaries: the Quechua Indian Bolivian José Kondori and the black Brazilian Antônio Francisco Lisboa (known as Aleijadinho). Lezama takes Aleijadinho, in particular, as a new emblem: son of a white Portuguese architect and a black slave, Aleijadinho realizes the "imposing synthesis" that comprises the American Baroque. Not just his works, but his very body, Lezama argues, engender "the sparks of rebellion that emerge from the great creative leprosy of our Baroque" (240).

Again, Lezama ties this maneuver to Góngora, in a way this passage from González Echevarría (1993) illuminates:

> Yes, Góngora is obscure, but only because his poetics worked at the margins of Western tradition, at the point where the tradition subverts itself by nurturing forces that negate its mainstream ideology. Góngora is, in fact, ornamental, artificial, obscure, because for him beauty is not found (paradoxically) in the tenets of the Greco-Latin tradition that he supposedly attempted to emulate. Góngora's poetry is inclusive rather than exclusive, willing to create and incorporate the new, literally in the form

> of neologisms. He is anxious to overturn the tyranny of syntax, making the hyperbaton the most prominent feature of his poetry. It is for this reason, not by some quirk, that Góngora was the first to write poems imitating the speech of blacks, or better yet, *in* the speech of blacks. (197)

González Echevarría also observes that Góngora's style, despite his *culteranista* reputation, freely blended elements of "high" and "low" forms of representation, and that Góngora's poetry incorporated what González Echevarría calls "base or heterogeneous elements" while focusing less on reality and more on its representation (197). For González Echevarría, writers in the New World embraced Góngora's poetry "perhaps because they felt it could contain their world" (198). That is, in the baroque notion of enjoyment, in its voracity and capaciousness, American subjects found space to both exist and resist.

González Echevarría takes advantage of the diverse character (recognized by Lezama) of American *gongorismo*—from Sigüenza y Góngora to Aleijadinho—to depict Afro-Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén as an heir to Góngora's legacy. In a very interesting move, González Echevarría reads the American Baroque through a work of fiction, Alejo Carpentier's 1974 novel *Concierto barroco*, whose main characters are a wealthy Mexican of European descent (known alternately as the *Amo* or the *Indiano*) and his Afro-Cuban servant and musician, Filomeno.[47] González Echevarría is not alone in seeing a relation between New World Baroque Theory and *Concierto barroco*: Zamora and Kaup say, for example, that with the character of the *Indiano*, Carpentier "brings

[47] "In his 1974 novella *Concierto barroco* [*Baroque Concert*] Carpentier suggests ways in which the Baroque is related to the aesthetics of Afro-Cubanism to which I am much indebted and which, I believe, clarify the perspective from which I read Guillén's poems in this essay."

Lezama's *señor barroco* to life" (210). But whereas they focus on the Lezamian character of the wealthy *Indiano*, thus contributing to the common critical perception that Lezama's New World Baroque de-racializes American expression, González Echevarría instead focuses on Filomeno, the other half of the pair, who corresponds more closely to Aleijadinho, the hero of the second half of "Baroque Curiosity" than to the *señor barroco* of the first half.[48] González Echevarría writes:

> Filomeno claims to be a descendant of Salvador Golomón, the black protagonist of *Espejo de paciencia* [*Mirror of Patience*], a Cuban baroque epic written in 1608 by Silvestre de Balboa y Troya de Quesada. Filomeno's literary genealogy makes of Carpentier's novella a metafictional statement on literary history that is like a manifesto of Afro-Antillean baroque aesthetics. Filomeno brings to the Old World his fiercely independent set of values as well as his shockingly visible physical difference: his color, which makes him an object of curiosity and desire. (199)

For González Echevarría, Filomeno represents a line of American *barroquismo* as deeply entrenched as the *Indiano*'s, one that González Echevarría reads into Guillén's poems. González Echevarría focuses especially on two baroque characteristics in those poems—a lack of interiority and meta-theatricality—and shows how, in Guillén, those characteristics take on a Gongoresque racialization that subverts nationalizing traditions

[48] This difference is a matter of emphasis, rather than a point of real disagreement: Zamora and Kaup point out, too, that while "*El señor barroco* is modeled on the *criollo* landowning class, … his persona also embraces *criollo* poets and intellectuals (Lezama's examples are Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and Carlos Sigüenza y Góngora) and Indian, mestizo, and mulatto artists (such as Kondori and Aleijadinho)" (210).

from the margins. Though González Echevarría limits his study to Latin American manifestations of the Baroque, much of his argument could apply to Johnson's novel as well.

In an aside about *Concierto barroco*, González Echevarría points out that when Carpentier has Filomeno leave his master to attend a concert by Louis Armstrong in Paris, "the time of the novel leaps from the eighteenth century to the nineteen-twenties, from the end of the Baroque to the years of Afro-Antilleanism and the Harlem Renaissance, thereby showing their common historical lineage" (199-200). The observation becomes more suggestive when we recall that Johnson's novel, too, features an America-to-Europe journey with a similar dynamic.

Just as *Concierto Barroco*'s unnamed narrator contracts Filomeno after hearing him strumming a guitar and singing the exploits of Golomón, the narrator of *The Autobiography* is invited to Europe to accompany an unnamed white man, referred to in the novel as "my patron," "my benefactor," and "my millionaire," who discovers the narrator playing ragtime piano at a barrelhouse in Harlem. The two travel to Paris, London, Madrid and Berlin, where the narrator plays exclusively for "his millionaire" and his playboy friends. Similarly, Filomeno and his *Indiano* sail for Europe, arriving finally in Venice, where Filomeno dazzles Handel, Scarlatti, and Vivaldi in a time-scrambling "jam session" at the Ospedale della Pietà. While in Europe, both characters experience music-related epiphanies: after the cosmic jam session, Filomeno makes the aforementioned decision to set out for Paris and Louis Armstrong with his trumpet; *The Autobiographyy*'s narrator, in turn, discovers his life's project after hearing a German musician recycle the ragtime chords he has just played into a classical composition. Like

Filomeno, the narrator breaks with his patron, in this case heading back to the United States to collect material (from Negro spirituals and folk songs) with which to write great compositions that will bring glory to his race.

The parallels between the two characters are striking. So, when González Echevarría insists that we must consider Filomeno to understand the American Baroque, it is worthwhile to think about what to do with Johnson's Filomeno in New York City, and to explore the meaning of a Harlem Neobaroque.

1.5 Johnson and the Jazz Matrix

In analyzing both "Plácido's Farewell to his Mother" and *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, two things stand out. First are the overlaps, the numerous parallels, and (I argue) the influence of Latin American baroque aesthetics on both texts, in which baroque relations of racialized markers serve to undermine white supremacist constructions of national identity. As such, our analyses complicate critical readings of Johnson, like that performed by Salim Washington, that would dismiss his writing as race-blind, bourgeois apologetics for the status quo. We should further note that what we are calling Johnson's *barroquismo* is not coincidental, but reflects both a conscious effort on the author's part to incorporate international models of resistance to racial hegemony as well as an internalization of the cultural currents in which the author traveled. In this latter sense, Johnson's baroque tendencies can be seen as resulting from a number of factors: not only Johnson's personal biography, but also the natural porousness of culture, as well as Latin American and African American cultural tendencies for expansion and appropriation. That is to say that for Johnson, and for many African Americans, the New

World Baroque is as much a birthright as is the more general Western culture that Johnson insists was built by blacks. Just as African American jazz is unimaginable without what Jelly Roll Morton named "the Spanish tinge," Johnson, like many of his Harlem Renaissance compatriots, claimed a heritage with sometimes subtle but nonetheless sure and deep roots in Latin America.

The other notable phenomenon in our examination of Johnson's texts is the centrality of music in both, a trait they share with Johnson's work as a whole. We described how, in Johnson's hands, "Plácido's Farewell to his Mother" became a blues poem, a piece in conversation with Langston Hughes and the blues poets Johnson included in *The Book of American Negro Poetry*. And we saw how, in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, the neobaroque subversions of white supremacy are most fully rendered in Johnson's "blues" perspective and in the novel's elaboration of the relationship between ragtime and classical European music. In closing this chapter, I would like to make explicit what the previous pages suggest: that these two phenomena are interrelated, and that the ways that Johnson can be described as a New World Baroque writer are the same ways that he fits into Baker's "blues matrix" and Gates' notion of "Signifyin(g)." As we have seen, for Baker, as for Gates and even Baraka (and others), African American expression, both musical and literary, share notions of elaboration, of time, of ellipsis as semantic play that we can say (following Sarduy, Kaup, Carpentier and others) characterize the Neobaroque. In other words, the baroque nature that we have traced, along with Winks, Feith, and others, into African American literature is part and parcel of a larger expressive mode that can be expressed in and, in the case of James Weldon Johnson, is perhaps best understood in, musical terms.

This connection will guide this study in the chapters to come, particularly as we examine Cuban author Alejo Carpentier's New World Baroque readings and literary reinterpretations of African American blues and jazz. As we do so, it will be helpful at this point to expand our language, and, rather than referring to Johnson as a blues (or, following Barnhart, a ragtime) writer, start calling him a jazz writer. As discussed in the Introduction, Baker's blues matrix was never meant to refer to a specific form, but instead to a form assumed to encapsulate all African American music. By using a more internationalized alternative, jazz, to refer to the same tree of music (a move which, again, I think is warranted), we can find even more common ground with which to explore the musical machinations of Carpentier's fiction. Jazz, as we will see, plays a significant role in Carpentier's developing understanding of national identity—as clear a role, if not clearer, as Latin American racial politics played in Johnson's. Having examined the meanings of Latin America in two of Johnson's key texts, we are now prepared to explore the other arm of the chiasmus, the meaning of African American music in the writings of Alejo Carpentier.

Chapter 2:

Jazz, Joyce, and the New World Baroque in Alejo Carpentier

2.1 *El acoso*, Sirens, and Carpentier's Joyce

2.1.1. Introduction: Carpentier and Joyce

On September 5, 1954, Alejo Carpentier, then living in Caracas, used his column in the Venezuelan daily *El nacional* to celebrate the re-appearance in print of a series of recollected conversations with James Joyce. The conversations came from the notebooks of Georges Borach, who had been a language student of Joyce, and had originally been published in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* in 1931. In 1954, they were rediscovered by Joseph Prescott and translated, first into English by Prescott, and then into French by Madeleine Zaval.[49] Carpentier called this re-publication "una inestimable contribución" to the study of literature.

Two passages in particular captured Carpentier's attention. In the first, Joyce explains why he chose Homer's *Odyssey* as the model and source for *Ulysses*;[50] the second recounts Joyce's composition of the novel's Sirens chapter. Carpentier translated both for his readers, reporting Joyce's words in the latter passage as follows:

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[49] It is not clear which version of the text Carpentier read. Prescott's translation appeared in March of that year; Zaval's appeared in August. Given the timing of Carpentier's column and his knowledge of French, it is most likely that he read Zaval's version. However, he does credit Prescott with the re-discovery of the notebooks ("Elaboración" 130). Zaval also mentions Prescott (198), but Carpentier does not mention Zaval.

[50] "¿Por qué regresaba sin tregua a ese asunto? Pues, porque en estos momentos *La Odisea* constiuye, a mi modo de ver, la literatura más humana del mundo entero" ("Elaboración" 130).

> Acabo de terminar el capítulo de las sirenas. Un tremendo trabajo. Escribí ese capítulo utilizando las técnicas de la música. Es una fuga, con todos los matices musicales: piano, fuerte, ralentando, etc. … También hay un quinteto, como en *Los maestros cantores*, la ópera de Wagner que prefiero. ("Elaboración" 130-1)

"Conversations with James Joyce" crossed Carpentier's desk at a propitious moment, one of several points in the Cuban's career when the subjects of music and the novel were converging in his thoughts. Carpentier's most recent novel, *Los pasos perdidos* (1953), treated an unnamed composer's journey through time and space to the source of both civilization and music; his next work, the short novel *El acoso* (1956), would be built around a fictional performance in Havana of Beethoven's Third Symphony. These two works are often cited by critics as examples of Carpentier's self-professed attempts to translate musical forms to fiction.[51] Coming in the midst of these efforts, Carpentier's translations of Joyce's words on Sirens (recollected by Borach) seem to reflect an effort to translate the Irish author into his own literary system.

In the fall of 1954, Carpentier was also finalizing the preparations for the Festival de Música Latinoamericana, which he had been promoting and organizing for months. In late November and early December of that year, the attention of the musical world was focused on Caracas, where renowned composers and critics convened to perform,

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[51] In 1968, Carpentier told the magazine *Imagen* that "el problema de la forma, en música, me ha preocupado mucho, siempre. Y he tratado de hacer transposiciones de conceptos formales musicales a conceptos formales literarios" (Silva Estrada 3). The specific texts Carpentier mentions as examples of these efforts are *El acoso* and the shorter works "Viaje a la semilla" and "El camino de Santiago." These three works would all be published together, along with "Semejante a la noche," in *La guerra del tiempo* (1958).

observe, and comment on the state of Latin American music. The unofficial but dominant theme of the festival, the recurring topic of its participants' interviews, speeches, and roundtables, involved the relation of nation to music. *El nacional* printed, each morning, composers' and critics' thoughts on the ways Latin American music could find its voice in a world still centered in Europe.[52] Carpentier would figure into these conversations, as well: on December 4, as part of a roundtable discussion with the critic Alfredo Matilla and the composers Juan Bautista Plaza and Héctor Tosar, Carpentier called for the founding of an international organization dedicated to disseminating Latin American music.

In Sirens, Carpentier found Joyce's treatment of the very theme that would animate the festival. Joyce's characters sing patriotic anthems in their colonizers' tongue; they build a national, insular identity on their mastery of continental music forms. Stuart Gilbert reminds us that "One of the most remarkable features of Dublin life in the heyday of Mr. Bloom was the boundless enthusiasm of all classes of citizens for music, especially of the vocal and operatic varieties" (237). Joyce portrays this national pride while highlighting the paradox that Gilbert also outlines:

> Thus to the Dubliners music was an essentially *Italian* art and they always liked to allude to songs by their Italian names, even though the opera whence they came was by a non-Italian composer and usually sung in English. Thus one would ask the other, "How did he sing the *Dio*

[52] The young composer Julián Orbón, for example, accepted his juried prize for composition with a speech stressing the "fecundity" of the American element in modern music. The professor Domingo Santa Cruz gave the festival's keynote address asserting the importance of spreading American music through Europe.

> *possente?* (*Even the bravest hearts may swell*), or, as in this episode, demand *M'appari* (*When I first saw…*). (244n)

Joyce's Sirens chapter reflects a similar dilemma to the one confronting Carpentier in 1954: an urge to forge an independent national identity in a country still in the thrall of European cultural standards. Moreover, Joyce's solution, as expressed in Sirens, comes very close to the solutions Carpentier would propose in his theoretical writings of the 1960s, particularly those on the New World Baroque.

Recently, critical conversations on Joyce's influence in Latin America have shifted away from a simple understanding of the adjective "Joycean" and towards an acknowledgement that, among Latin American writers, there are many Joyces and many ways of being Joycean (Salgado 2013). Reading *El acoso* next to Sirens, as we will in the pages that follow, it becomes clear that Carpentier's Joyce is particularly musical. This is important, because while some of his more ostensibly Joycean characteristics fall away in the texts that follow *El acoso*, his fixation on music never does. Nor does his often-conflicted interest in national expression. In fact, from this perspective, Carpentier's most Joycean novel might not be *El acoso*, but *Concierto barroco* (1974). In the former, black culture merely forms a background for the interplay of European musical forms; in the latter, as in Sirens, European music forms compete for space with folk music forms—most notably, in the case of *Concierto barroco*, with the Afro-Cuban popular form of the *son*.

In this chapter, we will explore the intersection of Carpentier's musical Joycean influence with his budding New World Baroque thinking, and the effect of this convergence on Carpentier's fiction. In particular, we will examine the role this

convergence played in Carpentier's understanding of national identity formation, and in his growing understanding of the centrality of black culture to Cuba and, more generally, to the Americas. Our investigation will track the progression from *El acoso* to *Concierto barroco*, allowing us to read the latter novel as the logical conclusion of the techniques broached in the former. In addition, we will situate that development within the larger arc of Carpentier's seven-decade career, offering in particular a contrast between his approach to black culture in *Concierto barroco* and his earlier *negrista* phase. In doing so, we will uncover Carpentier's (perhaps surprising) fascination with the place of African American music in US cultural identity, and argue that this fascination guided his writings on Cuban and Latin American culture. With this latter point, we will be able to connect Carpentier's evolving notion of the New World Baroque with the writings of James Weldon Johnson, featured in our previous chapter, and with Ralph Ellison, featured in our next.

This chapter will begin with a Joycean analysis of *El acoso*, paying particular attention to its reflection of Sirens' incorporation of hybrid music forms as a means of "camouflaging" subversive, Irish elements into the European novel form. Like Sirens, *El acoso* is, according to its author, built around an identifiable musical form; and, as with Sirens, critics of *El acoso* have had a hard time agreeing on how that form inflects text. Each author writes of European music as a form of culture imposed on his nation, and each presents a complicated means of resisting that imposition. By reading *El acoso* with Sirens, we will see that just as Joyce tied musicality into his notions of nation and imperialism, Carpentier's reading of Sirens helped shape the latter author's construction of Cuban national identity. From there, we will trace Carpentier's career-long

engagement with African-derived music forms from the Americas: both African American and Afro-Cuban. In doing so, we will attempt to answer one of the particularly vexing questions related to Carpentier's *oeuvre*: considering the attention Carpentier paid to black cultural expressions in his earlier years, why, after *El reino de este mundo*, do Afro-Caribbean themes seem to recede into the background of his works until *Concierto barroco*? In particular, we will look at his comments, which started in the 1940s and continued through 1964's "Problemática de la actual novela latinoamericana," repudiating his early black-themed writings, especially *Écue-Yamba-Ó!*

Carpentier's career is too long, and his writing too voluminous (and, frankly, too often self-contradictory) to reduce to a simple narrative, even if that narrative is one of evolution or progressive racial enlightenment. But his long struggle with the meaning of national identity for a multi-racial society is worth tracking, and—as we will see—is, in a real sense, productive. Furthermore, its prolonged interaction (parallels, shared and borrowed ideas) with African American discourse on North American culture makes it a useful tool for understanding the projects of certain African American authors.

2.1.2 Simultaneity and Sirens as *Semilla*

In a broad sense, then, this chapter will explore the ways music and nationalism overlap in Carpentier's work, with special emphasis on the contrast between *El acoso* and *Concierto barroco*. In order to consider the earlier work, in which Roberto González Echevarría sees obvious Joycean echoes, we will first need to understand Carpentier's

reading of Joyce.[53] That, in turn, means looking to Sirens and to the critical controversy that has swirled for decades around Joyce's notes and comments on the chapter. In "Problemática de actual novela latinoamericana," Carpentier calls on Latin American writers to "fijar la fisonomía de las ciudades como fijó Joyce la de Dublin" (16). But *El acoso* and *El siglo de las luces* (1962) are, arguably, the only novels where Carpentier fully dedicates himself to this task. This partially explains why Carpentier sometimes falls into the margins of critical conversations on the Joycean imprint in Latin American fiction.[54] But Carpentier's interest in the re-publishing of Borach's notebooks shows why that oversight is a mistake.

Again, according to Borach, Joyce asserted that Sirens is a fugue. The statement manages to be both specific and vague: how, specifically, is Sirens a fugue? And how do we relate that assertion to Joyce's next sentence, which ties the chapter to *The Meisteringer*?[55] How do we reconcile it with Joyce's letter to Harriet Weaver, in which he asserted that the chapter is *fuga per canonem* (*Letters I*, 129)? As Susan Brown outlines, a *fuga per canonem* is not the same as a fugue:

> The *fuga per canonem* is a strict form also known as a round (as in 'Three Blind Mice' or 'Frere Jacques'; see Honton 41) which, according to *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians,* is 'descended from the

[53] See *The Pilgrim at Home* (251).
[54] Emir Rodríguez Monegal (1977) focuses on Cortázar, Lezama Lima, Fuentes, and Cabrera Infante in his study on the Latin American Joyce; Morton Levitt (1982) lists ten Latin American writers whose works serve as "examples of Joyce's influence," but leaves out Carpentier. Even Leonard Orr, in "Joyce and the Contemporary Cuban Novel" (1992), writes around Carpentier, dedicating his analysis to Lezama Lima and Cabrera Infante.
[55] *The Meistersinger* does contain a fugue, but it comes before the opera's quintet, which closes Act 3.

> contrapuntal experiments of mediaeval monks' in the sixteenth century. The second is a radically complex contrapuntal form developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, most innovatively by Bach, and – *Grove's* explains – is 'contrary to the rules' (Williams 114-15). (Brown)

Critics have answered these questions in various ways. Gilbert, working with Joyce's notes and sources, argues that the chapter is indeed meant as a *fuga per canonem*, with Miss Douce and Miss Kennedy's song as its *subject,* Bloom as the *answer*, Boylan as the *countersubject*, and the songs of Simon Dedalus and Ben Dollard as *"Episodes* or *Divertimenti*" (248).[56] Zack Bowen finds the idea that Sirens is a canon ludicrous: "Does Gilbert mean to imply," he asks, "that they are all singing the same song, or that they strictly imitate one another?" (26)

Nadya Zimmerman offers a more conciliatory approach, suggesting that Joyce's understanding of *fuga per canonem* is a loose one that "incorporates both fugal and canonical rules" (110). More recently, Brown claims to have "solved the mystery" of the *fuga per canonem*. Brown found eight scribbled Italian words on the cover of Joyce's copybook for an early draft of Sirens, and she traced these terms to Ralph Vaughan Williams' entry for *fugue* in the second edition of *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1906).[57] Documenting Joyce's tendency to skim reference sources in unfamiliar subjects, she argues that Joyce mistakenly read the characteristics of a fugue

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[56] Carpentier was familiar with Gilbert's study, at least by 1957, when he called Gilbert "autor del mejor estudio que se haya consagrado hasta a ahora a *Ulises*" ("Cartas" 269).

[57] The eight terms on the copybook are (with Brown's translations): 1. soggetto (subject), 2. contrasoggetto (countersubject), 3. soggetto + contrasoggetto in contrapunto (subject + countersubject in counterpoint), 4. esposizione (exposition), 5. contraesposizione (counterexposition), 6. tela contrappuntistica (contrapuntal web), 7. stretto maestrale (masterly stretto), 8. pedale (pedal).

as characteristics of a *fuga per canonem.* This simple mistake, she writes, explains his contradictory pronouncements to Borach (fugue) and Weaver (*fuga per canonem*).[58]

Brown's study clarifies what Joyce meant when he told Weaver that the chapter contains "all the eight regular parts of a *fuga per canonem*" (*Letters I*, 129). While many critics, including Zimmerman, have assumed that "the eight regular parts" referred to eight voices, and from there have tied those voices to specific characters, Joyce's copybook seems to indicate that the eight parts are instead successive movements or sections that Williams says *can* characterize a fugue.[59] Brown does not put to rest all of the controversies surrounding the music of Sirens, though. The most striking challenge to the fugue/*fuga per canonem* readings of Sirens is the chapter's apparent overture section, comprising the first 63 lines of the text. A fugue generally does not have an overture, but music forms tied to narrative—operas and musicals—do.[60] Jasmine Mulliken has painstakingly mapped the lines of the overture to their appearances in the chapter body,

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[58] Michelle Witen argues that Brown has not solved the mystery of the source of Joyce's use of the term *fuga per canonem*. Instead, Brown's case "joins many other hydra-headed arguments: for every solution presented, two or more questions take its place." In particular, Witen questions Brown's insistence on Joyce's musical ignorance (citing George Antheil and Anthony Burgess) and what Witen calls Brown's "heavy interpretation" of Joyce's reading method, which is required to claim *Grove's* as the definitive source for Joyce's notion of fugal structure.

[59] Again, Brown attributes Joyce's use of the term "regular" in his letter to Weaver to Joyce's sloppy reading. Had he read the entry more carefully, she argues, he would have seen that Williams never claims that these "eight" parts are requirements of the fugal form.

[60] Bowen suggests that the chapter is a musical, writing that its musical references "[provide] a background of continuous music from which the episode draws its meaning and existence. In this sense, then, the chapter is a musical—with its overture and its songs performed literally or symbolically by the principal couple, Bloom and Molly, against the male chorus in the back room; the minor characters, Misses Douce and Kennedy; and Blazes Boylan" (29).

charting the "overlap, repetition, and inversion" of those appearances in the chapter's "generally sequential order" (96).

The chapter's beginning lends credence to operatic readings of Sirens, such as those proposed by A. Walton Litz and Timothy Martin. So does the chapter's well-noted use of *leitmotifs*, along with Joyce's aforementioned reference to *The Meistersinger*. Stanley Sultan has tied the chapter's structure to another opera, Flotow's *Martha*, two songs of which appear in the chapter—though Bowen argues that this is a mistake, since that opera's overture "contains only two significant motifs from the rest of the opera," while the Sirens overture is a medley, with "sixty-seven theme-and-description motifs from the entire chapter" (27).[61]

While Bowen thinks that the existence of fugal and operatic elements suggests that Sirens is neither an opera nor a fugue, Mulliken argues instead that the chapter may be *both*.[62] She writes:

> In fact, any one assignment of style or structure is reductive because Joyce intentionally problematizes multiple structures (linguistic, narrative, musical, print) throughout the novel. Joyce in effect did in literature what the cubists did in the visual arts: by employing several musical techniques as the Cubists employed several visual perspectives, he simultaneously

[61] The beginning section could also be read as a prelude to a symphony in sonata form, as Ordway (2007) observes: "Principal musical themes are often presaged or alluded to in fragmentary form over the course of an expansive introduction before they are stated explicitly at the beginning of the exposition. Ludwig van Beethoven, a true master of the sonata form, often precedes the exposition with a protracted introduction" (85).

[62] Bowen writes, "If the chapter is not composed along fugal lines, neither is it an opera." But he continues, "Just as the novel can never be tied exclusively to the rigorous formula of the *Odyssey*, the signs of the zodiac, or the mass, neither can the Sirens chapter be limited to one musical form exclusively." Mulliken builds on the possibilities implicit in Bowen's use of the word "exclusively," coming to a conclusion rather opposite Bowen's.

> shows several ways of *re-rendering* music as literature. The cubists depict simultaneous visual perspective; Joyce portrays simultaneous musical forms. The multiplicity of forms that inhabits the whole of *Ulysses* is one way the novel explores the possibilities of simultaneity. What many critics fail to observe, because doing so would complicate any one reading, is that Joyce intentionally implements multiple techniques at once. (90)

Mulliken notes that simultaneity is an important theme in the chapter, evident, for example, in the blending of Bloom, Simon Dedalus, and Lionel (the protagonist of Flotow's *Martha*) into the hybrid character "Siopold" (*Ulysses* 11.752). Further, she observes that simultaneity characterizes Joyce's technique in the chapter, from his extensive use of puns to his invention of words meant to suggest converging sounds.[63] As María Isabel Acosta Cruz notes, Joycean simultaneity resonates in the works of several Latin American authors as what Severo Sarduy calls condensation, which Acosta Cruz names "the most visible mechanism of the neobaroque" (21). In a move that is particularly suggestive for our reading of Carpentier, Mulliken connects this simultaneity to Joyce's treatment of music.[64] Mulliken argues that even Joyce's description of the chapter as a *fuga per canonem* reflects his love of coexisting contraries: while Brown sees Joyce's use of the term as an error caused by sloppy reading, Mulliken suggests that the contradictory nature of the phrase itself (*fuga*, "flight" vs. *canonem*, "rule") appealed to Joyce's "spirit of play," serving as a mischievous indicator of the chapter's tense

[63] "Clapclopclap. Encore, enclap, said, cried, clapped all" (*Ulysses* 11.757-8).
[64] Mulliken's comparison of Sirens to a cubist painting also resonates with a reading of *El acoso*. Frances Wyers Weber writes that, in Carpentier's novel, "A single episode, or even a simple physical gesture, may splinter into distinct images inserted at widely spaced sections of the narrative; past happenings are juggled so that the reader must infer the action on the basis of dispersed clues and signals" (440).

interplay of mutually exclusive elements (91).[65] This emphasis on simultaneity, Mulliken suggests, extends to the chapter's music-based structure(s): we can read Sirens as a fugue or as a *fuga per canonem* or as an opera, but it is best to read the chapter as a fugue *and* as a *fuga per canonem and* as an opera.

Carpentier could have come to the same conclusion reading Joyce's comments in Borach's notebooks. Yet Carpentier also would have noted something that escapes most structural analyses of Sirens: the complicated way Joyce interweaves the chapter's Western, classical music forms with the Irish identity he builds throughout the novel. Joyce intersperses his proliferating forms—fugue, *fuga per canonem*, opera—with nationalist anthems and patriotic folk songs. Key lines in Sirens derive from the "The Memory of the Dead" and "The Harp that Once Through Tara's Halls," nostalgic tunes that mourn Ireland's lost glory and implicitly demonize its colonizers.[66] As Mabel Worthington observes, there is also "a reference to almost every line" of the ballad "The Croppy Boy" in Sirens (325). That song relates the story of a naïve young Irish soldier, his father and brothers killed by the British, who stops for confession on his way to battle at Wexford. The soldier does not know that the land through which he is traveling has been taken by the British, and that the priest who hears his patriotic confession—"I bear no grudge against living thing; / but I love my country above the king"—is actually a disguised British "yeoman captain with fiery glare" (Worthington 326). In this stridently

[65] These are not mutually exclusive arguments—it is possible that Joyce, reading carelessly, confused the terms *fugue* and *fuga per canonem*, and also that the contradictoriness of the latter pleased him.

[66] The theme of the latter song is expressed in its first verse: "The harp that once through Tara's halls / the soul of music shed / Now hangs mute on Tara's walls / As if that soul were fled" (Worthington 330).

nationalist song, the Croppy Boy is brave and virtuous, while the English captain is blasphemous and cowardly.

The proliferating classical forms, in other words—the formal intricacies that have brought so much analysis to the chapter—carry within them fragments of Irish culture, including several boldly political, nationalist statements. A reader of Latin American fiction will recall Carpentier's notion of the political function of Baroque aesthetics in the New World, which César Salgado has characterized as "an ironic reversal of the Spanish imperial project, one in which, through hybridizing strategies, the colonial subject took advantage of baroque elements in the dominant discourse to create sites and terms for resistance and survival" (317). In the hybridized musical forms that fill Sirens, Irish identity survives and even resists both British domination and easy assumptions about continental cultural superiority. Sirens thus participates in the anti-imperialist project that critics such as Enda Duffy and Emer Nolan argue characterizes *Ulysses* as a whole.

We might call this a "camouflaged nationalism," and Joyce's use of Flotow's *Martha* illustrates it perfectly. As noted, the opera is so central to the chapter that Sultan sees it as the key to understanding Sirens' structure. In the course of Sirens, Joyce equates the opera's protagonist, Lionel, with Bloom, while its title character is connected to both Bloom's wife, Molly, and the object of his straying affection, Martha Clifford. Two songs from the opera appear in the chapter, "*M'appari*" and "'Tis the Last Rose of Summer." The lyrics of the latter originally came from the pen of the Irish Romantic poet Tom Moore; another Irishman, John Stevenson, wrote the arrangement. Flotow incorporated the song into his opera, where it became "Martha's leitmotif and the central melody of [Lionel and Martha's] love" (Bowen 69). Thus the German opera (sung in

Italian, with an English setting) that dominates the scene depends, in turn, on an Irish melody, although it is not clear whether or not Joyce's characters realize it. Simon Dedalus' performance of "*M'appari*" also has nationalist overtones: asked by Father Cowley to sing the version from *Martha*, Dedalus instead sings the English version, "Come Back, Martha! Ah Return Love," arranged by Charles W. Glover and written by Charles Jeffreys (Bowen 40). Glover was Irish—and though Jeffreys was English, he wrote "Oh Erin, my Country!" and "The Rose of Allandale," which became popular among Irish folksingers.

At the same time, the appearance of Irish songs in Sirens does not signal a simple embrace of Irish nationalism. As David Lloyd points out, the songs themselves are hybrid artifacts, cobbled together through interactions of various cultures, and marked by the language of Ireland's English colonizers. In fact, the writers of the most prominent nationalist movement of Joyce's day, the Irish Literary Revival, rejected traditional folk songs as a possible building block for Irish literature because, due to the many ruptures that scarred Irish history, such songs presented an Irish identity that was at best incomplete and at worst contaminated by extrinsic elements (Lloyd 88-96).

Instead, the Irish literary nationalists believed "a national poetry must speak with one voice and … must represent the Irish people as the agent of its own history, of a history which has 'the unity and purpose of an epic poem'" (Lloyd 97). This ruled out the Anglo-Irish ballads, obviously. It ruled out the street ballads, which generally developed in urban centers where the English influence was most pervasive.[67] It even

[67] Lloyd points out that the street ballads are adulterated in every way: "Military language can cohabit with that of the racecourse, or classical references give way to citations of ancient and modern history, folk heroes and contemporary slang. Much of the pleasure

ruled out the mass of Gaelic songs that survived in Ireland, which the nationalists saw as fragmentary and corrupted by outside influence (Lloyd 91-2). The Irish Literary Revival thought that an authentic, pure Irish identity could pose an alternative to British hegemony, and they sought to recover this identity by purging impurities and corruptions from the nation's literature.

Joyce, Lloyd argues, took the opposite tack, building his resistance to English imperialism through supplementation and amalgamation. Where Irish nationalists sought an authentic alternative to oppressive power, Joyce celebrates inauthenticity; where they demand purity, Joyce emphasizes what Lloyd calls "adulteration," an ethic of betrayal and cultural promiscuity. Sirens, like *El acoso*, can be read as an "almost allegorical depiction of Betrayal in its various modes and incarnations" (Weber 440). The metaphor of Bloom and Molly may be instructive. Joyce's commentary on marital infidelity, throughout both the chapter and the novel, is hardly limited to a depiction of "the pathos of lonely, betrayed Bloom," as Bowen suggests (27). Instead, thinking about his wife's assignation with Boylan, Bloom is by turns dejected, resigned and aroused; his own flirtatious correspondence with Martha Clifford also occupies his mind, as Joyce emphasizes more than once in Sirens.

Just as Joyce refuses to present pure marital fidelity as an absolute or ideal good in the novel, Sirens shows that Joyce is also, in Lloyd's words, "recalcitrant to the aesthetic politics of nationalism"—that is, to an aesthetics of purity and fidelity (13). In this sense, Joyce's Irish nationalism is a sort of anti-nationalism, as critical of pure

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of the street ballad, as with so many 'popular' forms, derives from precisely this indifference to cultural hierarchies" (96).

Irishness as it is of cultural imposition. Sirens, in this reading, echoes statements Joyce made in 1907 on the subject of nationalism, in which he said:

> …our civilization is a vast fabric, in which the most diverse elements are mingled, in which Nordic aggressiveness and Roman law, the new bourgeois conventions and the remnants of a Syriac religion are reconciled. In such a fabric, it is useless to look for a thread that may have remained pure and virgin without having undergone the influence of a neighboring thread. (*"*Ireland" 165)

In that lecture, Joyce critiqued the notion of pure nationality in general (suggesting it might be a "convenient fiction") while emphasizing the particular hybridity of the Irish. "Do we not see," he asked, "[that] in Ireland, the Danes, the Firlbolgs, the Milesians from Spain, the Norman invaders and the Anglo-Saxon settlers have united to form a new entity?" (166)

This anti-nationalist nationalism is consistent with the musical content of Sirens. After Simon Dedalus sings his Irish version of "*M'appari*," Richie Goulding breaks from his conversation with Bloom to sing "Down among the dead men," an English drinking song that begins "Here's a health to the King," (Bowen 41). As contrary as that sentiment seems to the one expressed by "The Croppy Boy," ("I love my country above the king"), the juxtaposition of the two songs illustrates Joyce's complicated notion of Irish identity.

Returning to Sirens through the lens of Borach's notebooks, Carpentier would have thus found a chapter that shared his preoccupation with translating musical forms into literary ones. His interest in national identity and the problems of nationalism would

have drawn his attention to the complex Irish identity Joyce builds in the chapter. More than that, his musical training would have allowed him to see the complications inherent in Joyce's insistence that the chapter was a fugue. Carpentier works through all of these issues in *El acoso*; his column in *El nacional* suggests that he was already assimilating Sirens to the novel's concerns.

2.1.3. *El acoso* and Carpentier's Joyce

A strange balance of pride in nation and betrayal of nation characterizes *El acoso* as much as it does Sirens. Because of this similarity, it is interesting how closely the issue of music in Carpentier's *El acoso* parallels Sirens' critical history. As with Sirens, the author's seemingly straightforward pronouncement to César Leante ("está estructurada en forma de sonata") led not to clarity but to decades of critical confusion. Different critical readings of *El acoso* hinge on an ambiguity in Carpentier's comment: "en forma de sonata" might be seen as a sort of pun. In English, we could interpret it as either "in the form of a sonata" or "in sonata form," with very different implications for our reading of the novel's structure. Briefly, sonata form refers to the structure typically used in the first movement of a multi-movement piece. It generally includes an exposition, development and recapitulation. On the other hand, sonata is a more general term that refers to a multi-movement piece, typically written for a solo instrument or small ensemble.[68] Sonatas, too, are rigidly structured, though the particulars differ by composer and era. Emil Volek offers a nice, if necessarily vague, definition: "una composición de tres hasta cuatro trozos de diversos tiempos y cada uno en distinta forma" (392).

[68] Cf. "Sonata," *Oxford Music Online* and "Sonata Form," *Oxford Music Online*.

The second part of Carpentier's pronouncement ("Primera parte, exposición, tres temas, diecisiete variaciones, y conclusión o coda") suggests he is referring to sonata form. Volek makes this case by comparing the novel's themes with the musical themes in a typical composition written in sonata form. For Volek, the novel's two temporal planes, past and present (represented, respectively, by the fugitive and the ticket-taker), represent the piece's voices, and Volek charts the appearance of recurring images and minor characters as the piece's motifs.

Volek's argument appears in Helmy Giacoman's *Homenaje a Alejo Carpentier* (1970), a few pages before Giacoman's own analysis, which ties the novella to Beethoven's Third Symphony. Giacoman meticulously maps *El acoso*'s plot onto specific notes in the symphony. Crescendos in the *Eroica* correspond to crescendos in the novel's drama; entrances and exits of characters to entrances and exits of musical voices. The dialogue between the ticket-taker and the prostitute Estrella, near the end of the novel's first large section, is analogous to the dialogue between string and woodwinds that precedes the symphony's funeral march (Giacoman, 449). In this way, Giacoman argues that the entire novel is, in essence, a dramatization of the symphony.

Like Volek's, Giacoman's case is supported by Carpentier's comments—specifically, his repeated assertions that *El acoso* is meant to correspond to the duration of the symphony. However, Volek's article presents some problems. In the first place, it requires us to ignore the most obvious structure the author has left us—*El acoso*'s tripartite division—since Beethoven's Third Symphony contains four movements, not three. This is surprisingly common in structural analyses of Carpentier's novels. Roberto González Echevarría, for example, begins his ingenious numerological reading of *El*

reino de este mundo by dismissing that novel's ostensible structure, writing, "If the four part division is abandoned…" (135). An even more striking problem results from the fact that, except for its first movement, Beethoven's *Third Symphony* is not written in sonata form. If we do not accept that some measure of structural simultaneity is at work in *El acoso*, then Volek and Giacoman's arguments are irreconcilable, as are Carpentier's own comments on the novel.

Katia Chornik has recently offered a sonata form reading of *El acoso* that differs slightly from Volek: for her, each of the novel's three large divisions parallels a division in sonata form (exposition, development, recapitulation). Characters equate to musical themes, and each of the chapters in the exposition represents one of a musical piece's subject groups.[69] The variations in Part II develop the theme of the fugitive, and the novel's return to the concert hall in Part III "brings back two of the three themes from Part I: first the fugitive then the ticket seller" (Chornik). It is a simpler analysis than Volek's, and it ends with an important caveat. Carpentier, Chornik writes, "appears to be holding different musical forms in tension." By refusing to make her sonata form reading of the novel exclusive, Chornik parallels Mulliken's work on Joyce's Sirens chapter.[70]

[69] Chornik notes that, typically, there are only two subject groups in a piece written in sonata form, but cites a number of theorists (including Julio Bas) who divide the exposition into three parts.

[70] Although he dismisses sonata readings of *El acoso* early in his argument, after considering the novel's third section Volek also allows that there may be simultaneous structures at work. "A base de este análisis," he writes, "podemos hacer la conclusión de que las tres secciones diferenciadas sugieren una sonata entera… La posible ambigüedad del término se nos muestra en una nueva luz" (413).

Instead of relying on Leante's account of Carpentier's famous pronouncement, Chornik uses previously unexamined manuscript of a radio lecture ("Las novelas *El acoso* y *El siglo de las luces*"), first broadcast in 1965.[71] In that lecture, Carpentier said:

> Ahora bien, me dije: ¿no será posible, ya que voy a inscribir esta acción dentro del tiempo de duración de la Sinfonía *Heroica*, adaptar a la novela misma una forma, que es lo que se llama en música, la forma sonata? Cuando se habla de una sinfonía, se habla de un concerto, se habla de una sonata, se habla, en realidad, de una misma cosa. La sinfonía es una sonata para muchos instrumentos; el concerto es una sonata para orquesta o pequeño conjunto o conjunto de cámara y un instrumento que desempeña un papel capital. En cuanto a la sonata—invirtiendo el razonamiento—viene a ser una sinfonía, sencillamente, para pocos instrumentos e incluso, en ciertos casos, para dos instrumentos y, acaso, hasta para uno solo. Traté, pues, en *El acoso*, de adaptar la forma sonata y construí la novela de la manera siguiente: primera parte, tres personajes, tres temas; segunda parte de la novela, variaciones; tercera parte, recapitulación o coda. (79)

The passage supports the sonata form argument while simultaneously denying its exclusivity. On the one hand, Carpentier here eliminates the ambiguity that Leante reports, telling us clearly that *El acoso* is adapted from sonata form ("la forma sonata").[72]

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[71] Chornik notes that "Confesiones" is not an actual interview, but instead an "account" of an interview. She also notes that it contains what seems to be an obvious error: Carpentier supposedly told Leante that there are 17 variations on the novel's themes, but the middle section of the novel contains only 13 divisions.

[72] Carpentier uses the same language in his 1968 interview for *Imagen*, telling Alfredo Silva Estrada, "Es evidente que *El acoso* responde a una estructura que podríamos definir

At the same time, he advocates for a looser understanding of the word sonata, implicitly equating sonata and sonata form and explicitly equating symphonies, sonatas, and concertos, which (he says) differ only in the number of instruments they employ. *El acoso*, Carpentier tells us, is written in sonata form but, at the same time, it is a sonata, because it is a symphony and a symphony is a sonata.

Chornik downplays Carpentier's equation of sonata form, sonata and symphony, writing that it "may be explained by the fact that, typically, the first movement of each is in *sonata form*." Yet this assertion requires us to accept that Carpentier was either confused or careless about his musical terms. Alternately, we might see Carpentier's comments in light of Joyce's similarly confounding comments on Sirens. Just as Sirens is both a fugue and an opera, *El acoso* supports disparate and equally compelling readings because it is composed in both the structure of a symphony *and* in sonata form. We should also view these connections in light of the authors' shared preoccupation with national identity and cultural imposition. As we have seen, Carpentier saw hybridity and simultaneity as aesthetic strategies for cultural resistance and survival. Just as Joyce undermined notions of European superiority by seeding Sirens with hybridized Irish songs, we can expect Carpentier's multiplying Western music forms to express a hybridized Cuban identity.

Whereas Sirens' Irishness is expressed primarily through song, Carpentier builds *El acoso*'s *cubanidad* chiefly through his descriptions of Havana's architecture. The comparison holds when we consider the fact that Carpentier frequently connected music and architecture, calling the two "artes paralelas" (Leante 16). In *El acoso*, he explicitly

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como 'forma sonata,' con su estructura tripartita, encerrando una serie de variaciones centrales" (3).

merges the city with Beethoven's symphony, most strikingly at the end of the third chapter of the novel's second section when he writes, "En lo alto del edificio moderno sonaba una música: la misma de otras veces. Primero agitada; luego triste, lenta, monótona. Quien yacía en el piso…confundía esas notas sordas, a ratos, con el sordo ruido de la imprenta de tarjetas de visita" (58).

In fact, the novel might well be described as a novelistic rendering of the riotous architectural chaos that Carpentier later described in his essay on Havana, "La ciudad de las columnas" (1964). There, Carpentier writes:

> La vieja ciudad antaño llamada de *intramuros* es ciudad de sombras, hecha para la explotación de las sombras—sombra, ella misma, cuando se piensa en contraste con todo lo que le fue germinando, creciendo, hacia el oeste, desde los comienzos de este siglo, en que la superposición de estilos, la innovación estilos, buenos y malos, más malos que buenos, fueron creando a La Habana ese *estilo sin estilo* que a la larga, por proceso de simbiosis, de amalgama, se erige en un barroquismo peculiar que hace las veces de estilo, inscribiéndose en la historia de los comportamientos urbanísticos. (59-60)

He also describes the city as "la increíble profusión de las columnas, en una ciudad que es emporio de columnas, selva de columnas, columnata infinita" (61), coming very close to the descriptions he had used in *El acoso*.[73] Carpentier himself emphasized the close

[73] "Eran calzadas de columnas; avenidas, galerías, caminos de columnas, iluminadas *a giorno*, tan numerosas que ninguna población las tenía en tal reserva, dentro de un desorden de órdenes que mal paraba un dórico en los ejes de una fachada, junto a las volutas y acantos de un corintio de solemnidad, pomposamente erguido, a media cuadra,

relationship between the novel and the essay, writing that with the former, "lo que yo he tratado de hacer con [la novela] es trazar una especie de cuadro de la arquitectura de La Habana" ("Sobre su novelística" 130-1).

This relationship leads Yolanda Izquierdo to assert that, despite *El acoso*'s musicality, architecture is "el código más significativo de esta novela" (97n). She notes that the A-B-A sonata form that shapes *El acoso* is also a classical architectural form, two spaces framing a central block, producing a sense of equilibrium (138). *El acoso*, then, represents classical design in both the musical and architectural senses—in addition to the literary. But it is not enough to read the novel just in terms of design, or to see *El acoso* as the literary analog of a musical score or an architectural plan. In fact, Havana cannot be understood in terms of planned composition—the *acosado*, a former architecture student, concludes while surveying it that "Nada de eso tenía que ver con lo poco que el amparado hubiese aprendido en la Universidad" (45). Instead, an architectural understanding of the novel hinges on Carpentier's notion of the built environment as performative, a notion that pervades his writing on Latin American cityscapes, as when, in "Problemática de la actual novela latinoameriana" (1964), he writes of finding an example of faux-Romantic design in Havana "que se armonizaba maravillosamente con el silbante movimiento de las máquinas planchadoras de vapor" (17). For Carpentier, the city is improvisatory and idiosyncratic, and the novelist's task, to "fijar la fisonomía de nuestras ciudades como fijo Joyce la de Dublin," is to record its ephemeral performance in a specific moment.

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entre los secaderos de una lavandería cuyas cariátides desnarizadas portaban arquitrabes de madera" (44).

Again, Joycean criticism, specifically work that explores *Ulysses*' "gramophone effect," provides a useful comparison.[74] Building on Derrida, Thomas Jackson Rice describes the new modernist novel exemplified by *Ulysses* as a "talking machine" inspired by the potentials of sound recording technology that sought to preserve the "living presence" of the author's voice (152). However, citing Kittler, Rice reminds us that recording devices do not just preserve intentional speech. Instead, they catch all types of noises, including "the physiological accidents and stochastic disorder of bodies" (152). He continues, "Regardless of meaning or intent, [the phonograph] records all the voices and utterances produced by bodies, thus separating the signifying function of words … as well as their materiality (the graphic traces corresponding to the symbolic) from unseeable and unwritable noises" (152). Rice argues that Joyce's attempts to capture a whole, specific day in Dublin focus as much these unseeable and unwritable noises, these accidents and stochastic disorders, as on the intentional processes of composition and design.

Thinking of Carpentier as one of the "artists like Joyce" that Rice mentions in his essay can help us better understand the chaotic center that Izquierdo sees inside of *El acoso*'s harmonious design. The distance between the novel's classical ideals and the disordered city at its heart might parallel the distance between a score (or architectural plan) and a recording (or building). Ugliness and corruption, perhaps paradoxically, indicate health, vibrancy and life, corresponding to the dissonances and imperfections that are inevitably recorded when a score is brought to life through performance. Reading ugliness and disorder as health and vibrancy might also help mediate the tonal space

[74] The term "gramophone effect" comes from Derrida's famous address "*Ulysses* Gramophone" to the Ninth International James Joyce Symposium in 1984.

between *El acoso* and "La ciudad de las columnas." While both the novel and the essay record the architectural improvisation and amalgamation of Havana, the latter is celebratory and warm while the former is nightmarish and ugly. If ugliness is life, though, it is easier to see the two works as compatible.[75]

Izquierdo comes to a different conclusion, reading *El acoso*'s ugliness as a commentary on modernity's corrupting incursion on classical ideals. Building on the contrast between the older neighborhoods of Havana, particularly in the section known as Centro Habana, and the newer developments to the west—specifically, the section known as El Vedado—Izquierdo writes of *El acoso* as a novel of two mutually exclusive Havanas:

> …una moderna, afeada por el mal gusto burgués, inhóspita, El Vedado; otra, que constituye el centro no sólo físico—en el sentido geográfico y en el sentido arquitectónico, lugar donde el acosado aspira a encontrar refugio, de sombra de columna en sombra de columna—sino, sobre todo, semántico (erótico, vital, religioso, originario) y estético (la belleza que en el código neoclásico, por ejemplo, representaba un bosque de columnas). Este centro es, a su vez, maleado por la modernidad (que ha convertido el valor de uso de la ciudad en valor de cambio); tiene como centro de gravitación a una prostituta (Estrella) y, por lo tanto, se encuentra vacío semánticamente, al definirse como espacio de la carencia (104-5).

[75] "Problemática de la actual novela latinoamericana," published in the 1964 collection *Tientos y diferencias* with "La ciudad de las columnas," can also help mediate between that essay and *El acoso*. In "Problemática," Carpentier writes more both directly and more positively of the ugliness of Latin America's cities, as when he insists, "Nunca he visto edificios tan feos como los que pueden contemplarse en ciertas ciudades nuestras" ("Problemática" 16).

For Izquierdo, the *acosado*'s flight eastward from El Vedado into Centro Habana dramatizes a search for an originary, ideal city, one that represents the essential Havana. The *acosado*'s ultimate disillusionment, his inability to find refuge in the city center, is connected to the creeping modernity that has infiltrated even the older parts of Havana. In other words, Izquierdo suggests that Carpentier presents in *El acoso* a tragic rendering of a lost ideal, an essential Havana betrayed by the corrupting and extrinsic influence of modernity.

In his writings on Havana's architecture, however, Carpentier frequently points out the impurity of the supposedly "essentially Cuban" city center. Carpentier writes, for example, that while Centro Habana still contains some "admirable" neoclassical buildings, those buildings stand next to "una arquitectura más o menos madrileña, más o menos catalana—remotas alusiones a Gaudí—que en otros días me parecían inadmisables" ("Problemática" 17). Carpentier no longer sees that architecture as unacceptable, he implies, because he has recognized that the semantic center of Havana has *always* been a vacuum. In that sense, Carpentier is not drawing a contrast between El Vedado and Centro Habana so much as equating the two; similarly, in the novel, the frustration of the *acosado*'s search for the ideal Havana highlights the falsehood of the ideal itself.

Izquierdo is right to observe that *El acoso*, like Sirens, is built around a theme of betrayal, corruption, and impurity. Just as Joyce chooses songs in Sirens that foreground impurity, the buildings that dominate *El acoso* do the same. For example, Izquierdo cites Carpentier's description of the Iglesia del Sagrado Corazón de Jesus, a prominent church on the Calzada de la Reina, in Havana's center, as one of the few descriptions in *El acoso*

in which the city appears as a harmonious whole (123). But Sagrado Corazón is a neogothic building, built between 1914 and 1923. It shares neither scale nor style with its neighbors; the tallest church in the city, it juts above the façades that surround it, interrupting Centro Habana's neoclassical "selva de columnas."

In the center of Havana, the building seems to exemplify the mania for the context-free multiplication of styles that Carpentier says characterizes the development of El Vedado to the west. Thus El Vedado and Centro Habana are not mutually exclusive in *El acoso*; instead, they interpenetrate each other in a process of admixture and amalgamation. We see this, too, in reverse, with the *casona del Mirador*, the large colonial-style mansion in El Vedado which, despite its location in Havana's "new" quarter, "conservaba al menos el prestigio de un estilo" (11).

The mansion in El Vedado is one of the few spaces in *El acoso* to offer the *acosado* true, if imperfect, refuge.[76] It serves as an important test for Izquierdo's argument because, in the novel's many descriptions of the building, Carpentier emphasizes both its classical design (contrasting it with the "ugly" modern building that faces it) and its current state of corruption. The defining feature of the mansion's interior is a large spiral staircase. As Izquierdo reminds us, the staircase's shape evokes harmony, symmetry, and notions of natural order—not just in architecture, but in music, as well. In particular, she cites Leonardo Acosta, who connects the spiral to the dialectical

[76] The refuge is imperfect because, like every space in the novel, it comes to be seen as permeable and corruptible. The acosado, locked into the Mirador as the old woman lies dying, is forever worried that the wrong person will see him there.

progression of the symphony and to the shapes of musical instruments and sound-making devices, such as the bell of a trumpet, hunting horns, and conch shells.[77]

The staircase does not just serve as a symbol for ideal harmony in the novel, though—for the *acosado*, it has a more practical function. Hidden in the mansion's upper floor, the *acosado* takes advantage of the staircase's shape to hear visitors to the building before they are able to see him. It inverts the original purpose of the grand staircase in Cuban colonial homes, which Izquierdo informs us was to serve as a bridge between guest and host. Álvarez-Tabío, she notes, described the Cuban colonial staircases as "la esplendente vía del momentanéo descenso glorioso de los dueños de la casa desde el Olimpeo creado por el poder del dinero hacia la muchedumbre tímida y expectante." (qtd. in Izquierdo 121). In contrast, the staircase in the re-purposed *casona* separates the otherwise powerless *acosado* from his pursuers and shields him from their Olympian powers.

This is only one of several re-appropriations of classical forms in *El acoso*. The most obvious is the one that makes the mansion a welcoming home for the *acosado* in the first place: its conversion from a bourgeois palace into a tenement, a reversal so complete that the symbolic head of the house during the *acosado*'s stay is an aging, black, former servant. While Carpentier presents these reversals and inversions as decline, describing the mansion as "decaído" (34) and "venida a menos" (41), they literally provide space, meager though it may be, for the *acosado*'s survival. And Carpentier's references to Havana's architecture in "La ciudad de las columnas" and "Problemática de la actual novela latinoamericana" make clear that we should connect this disorder to expressions

[77] See *Música y épica en la novela de Alejo Carpentier* 104.

of Cuban national identity. *El acoso* thus dramatizes the process of cultural resistance that Salgado ascribes to the proliferation of baroque aesthetics in the New World, the "irreverente y desacompasado rejuego de entablamentos clásicos" that Carpentier says creates "ciudades aparentemente ordenadas y serenas" (70). If "*M'appari*" serves as a musical emblem of a similar camouflaged nationalism in Sirens, the *casona del Mirador* is Carpentier's architectural response: a classical structure reclaimed for popular use and now housing a conflicted revolutionary.

2.2 *Son,* Jazz, and Nationalism in Carpentier

When we say that Carpentier, like Joyce, is critically concerned with national identity and cultural imposition, though, we have to be clear that for much of his career (and certainly in *El acoso*) this concern manifests itself within the binaries of European culture and American (hemispheric) culture or, alternatively, the binaries of North American and Latin American culture. Carpentier is concerned, in other words, with developing Cuban (or Latin American) identity against the imposition of European (or North American) cultural values. The issue of race—and the extent to which white culture can or ought to be imposed on Cuba's blacks—plays a relatively small role in *El acoso*. This might seem paradoxical since, again, the character who dominates the novel's central image, the *Casona del mirador*, is a black former servant. And, of course, any discussion of "purity" in Cuban society has racial resonance. Nonetheless, Carpentier scarcely addresses race directly in *El acoso*, and the black subjects and themes that do appear in the novel do so in a text that clearly valorizes European-derived cultural expressions over African-derived ones. The clearest illustration of this privileging comes in the musical forms that, to return to Chornik's phrase, Carpentier holds in tension in the novel's structure.

Whether we read *El acoso* as a novelization of the sonata, of the sonata form, or of Beethoven's *Third Symphony*, in any case we are reading into it a European form.

Again, this is despite the significant presence of Afro-Cuban culture within the novel's characters, settings, and descriptions. And beyond that, it is despite Carpentier's long history of writing and theorizing about Afro-Cuban and Afro-Caribbean cultural phenomena, and incorporating them into his fiction. Carpentier's first novel, after all, was *Écue-Yamba-Ó!* (1933), an attempt to capture the experience of black workers on Cuba's sugar plantations. And the Cuban's maturity as a novelist begins with *El reino de este mundo*, a novel centered on the Haitian Revolution—which, tangentially, also captures a historical moment central to the development of Afro-Cuban (and Cuban) musical culture.[78] Nonetheless, Carpentier refuses in *El acoso* to locate value in Afro-Cuban music forms.

An easy explanation for this seeming paradox is that, for much of his career, Carpentier hewed to Hippolyte Taine's "nation-building narrative" approach to vernacular cultures. As Morrissette frames it, in this view "natural environs create a mood, which creates a people who exhibit that mood, a language representative of that place and people, a folk culture that carries these traits, and, at last, the development of that culture into a national culture that is representative of civilization. The ascension of folk culture to civilization marks the birth of a national culture" (108). According to this view, Afro-descendent musical styles can form the "building blocks" of a national

[78] As Carpentier explains in *La música en Cuba*, the Cuban *contradanza* evolved from the English *country dance*, which was transported to Haiti by French colonists as the *contredanse*. There, it became popular across race and caste lines. After Bouckman's rebellion of 1791, French refugees (or, more precisely, their slaves) brought the dance to Santiago de Cuba (146-52).

culture, but are not sufficient to constitute one in themselves. Again, this is the problematic understanding that Luiza Franco Moreira saw as aligning Carpentier with Alain Locke and Mario de Andrade, and that, in Chapter 1, I extended to parts of James Weldon Johnson's writings. Carpentier, as much as Johnson, fixated throughout his career on this theory and, specifically, on Dvořák's comment that "In the Negro melodies of America I discover all that is needed for a great and noble school of music."

Also like Johnson, Carpentier regularly attached a troubling racial essentialism to his writings on black music. That is, he wrote of musicality as a central aspect of black racial character. More than Johnson, though, who argued for the sophistication of African harmonies in his preface to the *Book of American Negro Spirituals*, Carpentier identifies this character with the primitive and the unlearned. In his glowing report from Paris on Lew Leslie's *Blackbirds Review* (1929), for example, Carpentier writes that the show's black performers "se mueven bajo bambalinas con una despreocupación de niños traviesos y geniales." Carpentier does not see this childlike naïveté as an act; rather it comes from "el sentido del ritmo que late con su sangre." "Lo primitivo, en el actor negro," Carpentier continues, "viene a ser una cuestión de temperamento" (406). While the primitivism inherent in Carpentier's enthusiasm for African-derived music softened somewhat by the time he wrote *La música en Cuba*, the idea of music as an especially "black" trait persisted.[79]

[79] See, for example, his contention in *La música en Cuba* that, when playing Cuban music, "blacks added an accent, a vitality, something unwritten that 'perked things up'" (158). Johnson wrote similar things (cf. *BANS* 28), as we will see below, but his stronger insistence on the sophistication of black melodies and harmonies, along with Carpentier's undeniably primitivist early comments on jazz, combine to produce a different, and less defensible, tone for the sentiment when it comes from the Cuban.

No doubt, these essentializing and primitivizing tendencies fed into Carpentier's adoption of Dvořák's cosmopolitanism. Black artists might provide the folk materials for great art, but the production of that art would have to come from artists (white, by implication) capable of synthesizing that material with the standards of the European academy. This view certainly shows up in Carpentier's enthusiasm for the projects of white artists like Amadeo Roldán in Cuba and George Gershwin in the United States.[80] Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to read Carpentier's views on vernacular, national culture, and race as uncomplicated or unchanging. While he was writing *El acoso*, for example, Carpentier was operating under an exceptionally sophisticated approach to national identity formation. In "El folklorismo musical," which appeared in four parts in his column in *El nacional* in 1957, Carpentier argues that, while nationalism is often associated with the folkloric, that association comes from the Romantics who, paradoxically, owed little to folkloric sources. "Pero a pesar de la atención creciente prestada a la canción popular, a la copla, la balada, la danza aldeana," he writes, "esos elementos son poco usados en las composiciones transcendentales—en aquellas que realmente hacen avanzar la técnica musical de la época" (47). Instead, Carpentier says, the best national music should not reflect a superficial pastiche of vernacular elements onto classical forms, but instead should be fully internalized, authentically springing forth from authentic sons of the soil. "El acento nacional," he writes of Schubert, "le surge, le

[80] Carpentier's privileging of white interpretations of black experience appears in his literary tastes, too. Though one struggles to find any reference in his writings to James Weldon Johnson, Ralph Ellison, or any African American author (even though the two named were both active in the musical world), Carpentier heaps praise on (white) trumpeter Mezz Mezzrow's autobiography, "Really the Blues" (1946). "El primer novelista auténtico de ese mundo," Carpentier called Mezzrow, a title that, one thinks, could as easily have been given to Johnson.

brota como debe ocurrirle al músico de raza: le viene de *dentro para fuera*, como le vendrá el acento francés a Debussy" (47).[81]

Though, in the essay, Carpentier gives the nationalist school of Russian opera as an example of superficial folklorism, the piece can be seen as an elaboration of his repudiation of his own *negrista* beginnings.[82] As such, it helps to explain the receding role Afro-Cuban and Afro-Caribbean culture took in *El acoso.* At the same time, it also illustrates the unavoidability of discussing race when discussing Carpentier's nationalist ideals, and the problems inherent in treating Carpentier's concept of race as static, or even as evolving in a linear fashion. While Carpentier remained engaged with the cultural expressions of blacks in the Americas throughout his writing career, the depth and direction of that engagement changed frequently. The author would later, in *Concierto barroco*, return Afro-descendant cultures to the center of his focus. In this later text, though, he allowed more space for black voices than he had earlier in his career: from the silent Panchón and Ti Noël he moves to the wry Filomeno, who highlights the centrality of Salvador Golomón in Cuba's national narrative.

In what follows we will posit that *Concierto barroco* represents a step forward in Carpentier's unsteadily evolving racial thinking. Gonzalo Celorio (2004) depicts the novel as a highpoint in Carpentier's career, the text in which his two great concepts—the

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[81] This essay lends credence to Leonardo Acosta's (2004) assertion that Carpentier is a Romantic writer rather than a Baroque one. That argument, though, is harder to sustain in light of the apparent anti-Romanticism of *El acoso* and, especially, *Los pasos perdidos*.

[82] Carpentier, who spoke Spanish with an accent almost as French as Debussy's, seems to miss the irony in his assertion that a national accent should come from the inside out. Also ironic is his complaint, from 1954, about "compositores cubanos que, por haberse formado fuera de Cuba, nunca dieron con una expresión musical realmente cubana, aunque usaran ritmos, giros, y temas de la isla" ("Nuevos plantamientos para un problema" 248).

Marvelous Real and the New World Baroque—converge most fully. While agreeing, I will also argue that the text is Carpentier's most racially self-aware, and that this development results from another convergence: that of his thinking on the New World Baroque and a deeper understanding of the radical possibilities of African American vernacular music.

2.3 Finding Jazz in Carpentier's New World Baroque

2.3.1 Son *and National Identity*

To approach this argument, we will sketch the various stages of Carpentier's relationship with Afro-descendant cultures, and more specifically, Afro-Cuban music forms, such as the *son*, and African American music forms, especially jazz.

What, specifically, did the *son* mean to Carpentier? The short answer is that Carpentier saw the *son* as an important expression of Cuba's national character, with the potential to make an impact on the international level, to raise the island nation's stature and bring it artistic glory. In a long article for *Carteles* from 1927 ("Amadeo Roldán y la música vernácula"), written before he left Havana for Paris, Carpentier pointed to the surge of modernist music built around "vernacular" folk forms like jazz or the Brazilian *maxixe* (he mentions Milhaud's *Saudades*) and asked why Cuban music couldn't inspire similarly vital works. It should, Carpentier insisted, writing that "nosotros hemos convivido durante años con verdaderas fuerzas de la naturaleza como el *son*, sin captar su inagotable caudal inspirador!" (85).

In the *son*, Carpentier hoped that Cuban composers would find the raw materials with which to construct an "elevated," universalized Cuban music, producing pieces that could stand at the same level as Lizst's "Hungarian Rhapsodies" and Smetana's *Má vlast*. The process for accomplishing this, Carpentier maintained, would involve two steps: identifying an appropriate folk style and then universalizing it, raising it to match international standards for compositional rigor. Carpentier insisted that, for too long, Cuban composers had failed at the first step, developing their "nationalist" music from the worst examples of Cuban music. "¿Por qué ha de considerarse," he wrote, "el *bolero*, por ejemplo, más cubano que la coloreada y trepidante *rumba*?" (84).

Against those composers who wasted time concocting "melodías de un cubanismo fácil" (85), Carpentier posed his friend and collaborator Amadeo Roldán. Roldán's great step forward, in Carpentier's eyes, came in recognizing that Cuba's national expression would necessarily be different than that of Bohemia, Hungary or Russia. Multiracial and relatively young, Cuba was, in Carpentier's words, one of the "grandes encrucijadas del mundo," with a musical tradition enriched by the *boleros* and *seguidillas* of Spain, the French *contredanse*, and by the rhythms brought to the island by black slaves. Roldán was singular in acknowledging the vitality of the island's African influences, particularly in the field of rhythm. "Una de las habilidades mayores de Amadeo Roldán," Carpentier wrote, "ha sido la de enfocar la música cubana desde un punto de vista casi nuevo entre nosotros, y que es el verdadero: la música cubana debe considerarse ante todo, según él, en función del ritmo" (85).

Carpentier would later de-emphasize the role of folklore in forming great national music, noting for example that works such as Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* and Mozart's

Don Juan had little to do with folklore but, nonetheless "pueden ser calificadas… de *nacionales* porque reflejan las características profundas, entrañables, de determinados hombres definidos por una nacionalidad" ("Del folklorismo musical," 56). And where once he praised Milhaud for incorporating into his *Saudades* Brazilian themes he had heard on a trip to South America, by the 1960s he was disparaging the ability of outsiders to produce "national" music, insisting that true national character must spring "de *dentro para fuera*." The author's shifting positions underscore a tension inherent in his goal of producing a unified national identity from disparate, unequally situated cultures, a tension all the more pronounced considering his position as a privileged white man who was, nevertheless, in many respects an outsider within his nation. As I've indicated above, this tension characterizes Carpentier's fiction, as well as his music criticism and musicology.

In the next few pages, we will explore Carpentier's relation to jazz, and to the African-American musical culture that the author used to both justify and illustrate his writings on the *son*. The connection should be clear: much of what Carpentier wrote about Cuban music could be said about North American popular music, too, from its reliance on the contributions of black musicians to its hybridizing tendency to incorporate alien musical forms. As we'll see, Carpentier frequently used jazz in his writings, though with ever-shifting intentions. By *Concierto barroco*, Carpentier was using jazz not to resolve the tensions in his own notion of *cubanidad*, but to express those tensions more fully.

2.3.2 Carpentier and Jazz

Carpentier's attitude toward African-American music, especially jazz, is complicated. Timothy Brennan notes that Carpentier saw the music's international popularity as an unfortunate North American imposition, tied to the US domination of the film industry, and that he saw jazz as inferior to Cuban music forms like the *son*. Carpentier did, after all, go to jail for signing a manifesto in which, among other political statements, he asserted that he would "always prefer the *son* to the Charleston" (Cairo 377). And while it's true that a similar version of nationalist chauvinism prompted Carpentier to write, on the debut of Don Azpiazu's Orchestra in Paris in 1929, "Ha muerto el jazz! Que viva el son!", the broader truth is that Carpentier *loved* jazz and wrote enthusiastically about the power and influence of African-American music, beginning on his arrival in Paris in 1927 and continuing throughout his career.

Carpentier's enthusiasm for jazz appears in the review he wrote for *Carteles* of a Paris performance of Lew Leslie's *Blackbirds Review*: in it, Carpentier describes the "escalofrío de la verdadera emoción" he felt on watching Aida Ward sing "Saint Louis Blues," and a sort of ecstasy produced by "la mágica acción de las síncopas" ("Bajo el cetro del *Blue*," 406). Carpentier's passion for the particular performance is apparent. He writes:

> Ante una sala replete de pecheras blancas, y mujeres interesantes y de edades indefinibles—como acontece, casi siempre, en París—vimos desfilar escenas de barrios bajos neoyorquinos, con sus matones de navaja, empleados de *Pullman* y *janitors* jugando al poker bajo la amenaza del *cob*. Supimos de pastores negros, bodas en la Louisiana, coplas entonadas en plantíos de algodón y de esqueletos joviales bailando *black-bottoms* en

> cementerios inundados. Aplaudimos a rabiar a un joven tenor que realizó una verdadera creación con el lindo *I can't give you any thing but love Baby…* (406)

In the review, Carpentier writes of jazz as both a personal pleasure ("Siempre he creido que los que aborrecen el jazz son individuos dotados de una pésima sensibilidad") and a revolutionary force ("El *jazz*… es la más importante manifestación folklórica que haya producida nuestra época") (407). The latter judgment appears repeatedly in Carpentier's writing on jazz, from his early dispatches from Paris to his *Letra y solfa* column in *El nacional.* And while Carpentier frequently anticipated the decadence and decline of jazz, he was always ready to welcome its resuscitation.[83]

2.3.3. Carpentier's "Blue" Period

In fact, though it's little studied now, Carpentier went through his own "Blue" period, in which he produced at least a few pieces of writing that were inspired by African-American music forms. This phase coincided with what some critics have called his *negrista* phase, in which, under the influence of Fernando Ortiz, Carpentier began to locate the heart of *cubanidad* in the contributions of blacks to Cuban culture—an insight which would continue to color all of Carpentier's theories on race and nation, even the

[83] It's almost comical to trace the number of times Carpentier proclaimed jazz dead or dying. The first time came in 1928; later he would proclaim that year part of jazz's golden age. Then, in 1951, Carpentier did it again, asking, "¿Estamos asistiendo a la agonía de género de música popular que se impuso en el mundo durante cerca de medio siglo?" ("Decadencia del Jazz," 26). In 1958, reviewing Barry Ulanov's *History of Jazz*, Carpentier decided that jazz was "más vivo que nunca," and mocked those who had proclaimed its death before. Of course, he neglected to mention that he had often been among them.

(very consequential) ones that came much later, his theories of the Marvelous Real and the New World Baroque. During this period, Carpentier published a series of what he called *poemas antillanos*, poems of the Antilles, and a number of poems which would later be grouped in his collected works as *poemas afrocubanos*. While Carpentier was in Paris, he put many of these poems to Cuban-inflected music, and he would work others, in collaboration with various composers, into what he called "Afrocuban ballets." Carpentier's *negrista* period culminated in 1933 with his first novel, *Écue-Yamba-Ó!*.

During these years, Carpentier was in especially close contact with José Antonio Fernández de Castro, the editor of the literary page of the Havana paper *Diario de la marina.* As Frank Guridy outlines in *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow*, Fernández de Castro served as an instrumental go-between for Cuban and African-American writers, especially the writers of the Harlem Renaissance. He was the first Cuban to publish a translation of Langston Hughes, translating "I, too, sing America" in 1928 for the magazine *Social*. And, when they visited Havana, Fernández de Castro hosted important figures from the Harlem Renaissance, including Hughes and Miguel Covarrubias, the Mexican caricaturist who sketched the cover of Hughes' *The Weary Blues*. Fernández de Castro introduced Hughes to Nicolás Guillén, initiating a fruitful transnational partnership that would shape the continued work of both poets.

The friendship between Carpentier and Fernández de Castro dates to the middle of the 1920s, when Carpentier frequented an apartment that Fernández de Castro rented from North American jazz artist Chuck Howard. That space, furnished with a piano and covered in the murals of Japanese painter Tetsuo Hama, became known as "the Little

Republic" and served as a meeting place for Havana's jazz fans, bohemians, and *negrista* artists, as well as visiting celebrities.[84] As Acosta writes, "That the neighbors never complained about the ragtime and blues music that came from the house every night seems to indicate that Havana locals had already developed an appreciation for this type of music" (22).

Both Fernández de Castro and Carpentier were part of the Minorista movement, and both signed a manifesto against the Machado dictatorship. This act landed them in jail for several months in 1927, and their shared imprisonment seems to have cemented their friendship. When Carpentier decided to leave Cuba for Paris to avoid further political persecution, he stayed in contact with Fernández de Castro during the years in which the latter was working hard to bring together black US and Cuban writers.

Carpentier's relationship with Fernández de Castro is important to keep in mind as we consider the history of one of Carpentier's most unusual pieces of writing, the poem "Blue," originally published by Fernández de Castro in the *Diario de la Marina*, in August of 1928, shortly after Carpentier had fled Havana for Paris. "Blue" stands out among the many Afro-Cuban compositions Carpentier was writing at the time. Its title is in English, and its setting is the Southern US—specifically, along the Mississippi River. Its characters are US blacks who work the cotton fields, though it's impossible to say whether they are antebellum slaves or twentieth-century sharecroppers. The poem is

[84] Indeed, "the Little Republic" was a momentous spot for Cuban music, as Leonardo Acosta writes: "[I]t was there that García Caturla first presented the piano version of one of his masterpieces, *Three Cuban Dances*, and that Amadeo Roldán first presented versions of his ballets *La rebambaramba* and *El milagro de Anaquillé*, which both included librettos from Carpentier" (22).

clearly Carpentier's attempt to harness the expressive power of the blues: it's a quirk of his English that, in his writings, he sometimes makes *the blues* singular.[85]

In Paris, Carpentier put the poem to music in collaboration with the composer Marius-François Gaillard. In that version, Carpentier removed the specific reference to the Mississippi River and made a number of textual changes that suggest, more generally, black experience in the New World, rather than the specific experience of blacks in the Southern US. What's more, the score was published with a cover featuring an image of a stylized palm tree looking out over a blue sea. This helps explain why Caroline Rae, writing about Carpentier's musical activities in Paris in the 1920s, describes the text as "evoking a somewhat romantic view of Cuban seascapes and plantations" (393). In other words, she sees the title "Blue" as a reference to the Caribbean, rather than *the blues*. And it helps explain how the poem could, somewhat plausibly, be included in Carpentier's collection "*Cinco poemas afrocubanos*."[86]

The holdings of the Fundación Alejo Carpentier in Havana illuminate the differences between the two versions of the poem, and make clearer the full extent of Carpentier's engagement with African-American music. Among Carpentier's papers at FAC is a handwritten poem draft or fragment, labeled in their finding aid by its first line, "Biblia con blues," which sheds light on the evolution from the original "Blue" to the version published in Paris. The original "Blue" features a character named Ruby who

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[85] In his article on The Blackbirds Review, for example, he writes of "los ritmos del *blue*"; in 1955, writing for *El nacional*, he similarly listed a number of "obras capitales inspiradas en los rítmos del *fox* y del *blue*" ("Jazz y la música culta," 430).

[86] This latter mistake is somewhat harder to explain, since the version published in that collection is the earlier, *Diario de la Marina* version. It's odd in any case that Hilario González, in the introduction to the volume of Carpentier's collected works that contains the poem, ignores the poem's African American emphasis.

balks when the poem's speaker tries to convince her to skip tomorrow's church service and head down the river with him. "But what would God say? / The Reverend will know! / The Lord and all the Saints, / What will they say?" she replies. But in the Paris version of the poem, Carpentier removes this section and replaces it with references to the Old Testament stories of Joshua, Daniel, and David. He also adds reference to the "freight train of the Lord."

All of these changes come from "Biblia con blues." In fact, because its setting is obviously the Southern US, its characters are African-Americans, and its themes are both religious and musical, it's easy to assume that "Biblia con blues" is a draft of "Blue." But few of the images or references specific to the *Diario de la Marina* "Blue" appear in "Biblia con blues," which differs markedly from the published poem. This is especially clear in the two texts' attitudes toward their subjects: "Blue" emphasizes materiality and the here-and-now. The deliverance it proposes comes from actual, physical flight ("I will take you down the river in my boat," promises the speaker), and takes the form of material wealth ("and my patent leather shoes will shine like archangels' haloes," he continues). In this version, Ruby's faith gets painted as a tool of oppression, one that distracts from a true quest for freedom ("You sing the hymns," the speaker deadpans, "and I'll go to heaven").

"Biblia con blues," on the other hand, expresses a more positive view of its characters' faith. Its speaker affirms that he (or she)[87] will continue singing hymns with Sister White and Sister Topsy, and this piety will lead to an ultimate, spiritual deliverance ("and I when I get to heaven I will have a bed with white blankets"). While "Blue" is

[87] It's possible that the speaker of this poem is, in fact, Ruby from "Blue."

clearly meant as a blues poem, "Biblia con blues" seems more like Carpentier's attempt to play with the other end of the spiritual/secular axis that defines African-American music. It is Carpentier's attempt, in other words, to write a Spiritual. The three biblical stories that the fragment alludes to—the stories of David, Daniel, and Joshua—are staples of traditional spirituals, appearing in "Lit'le David Play on Yo' Harp," "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?", and "Joshua Fit de Battle ob Jericho." The reference to the "freight train of the Lord" similarly evokes "Git on Board, Little Children."

Another document from the FAC—an undated, typed unpublished poem or draft titled "Spiritual Song"—confirms this hypothesis. The first line reads "Louisiana: Biblia con blues," suggesting that the handwritten fragment is either an earlier or later draft of this poem. "Spiritual Song" is set in black church, and like "Biblia con blues" it makes references to specific spirituals. Most notably, in "Spiritual Song" Carpentier builds on the allusion to "Git on Board," adapting the line "No second class aboard dis train, no diffrunce in de fare" into "Come with us on the sweet freight train of the Lord, a train that's first class, first class for all."[88]

This draft, too, contains only incidental overlap with the original "Blue," which seems to confirm that it's a separate poem, not a draft of the published one. Intriguingly, the poem's title, like "Blue," is in English, and the poem is labeled on the upper right hand corner with "Poemas en percusión," the same label that appears next to the title of the *Diario de la Marina* "Blue." We might infer that the two poems were meant to be paired together, perhaps in dialogue, with the spirituality of the blues working as a

[88] The English version given here comes from Johnson's *Book of American Negro Spirituals*. Carpentier's line in Spanish is: "Venid con nos[otros], en el dulce ferrocarril del Señor, ferrocarril con primeras, con primeras para todos."

counterpoint to the bluesiness of the spirituals. However, at some point Carpentier abandoned his "Spiritual Song," and this history was lost.

Carpentier ultimately abjured all of the work he produced in this "Blue" period, writing that, in that era, "resultaba cada vez más fácil 'dar color' a un poema o una escena dramática, hablando del 'ferrocarril del Señor', o del pecador pelotero, sacado en segunda por un *short stop* de índole angelica" ("Concierto," 165).[89] Indeed, Carpentier dismissed most of his early writing, commenting for example on *Écue-Yamba-Ó!* in 1964:

> En una época caracterizada por un gran interés hacía el folklore afrocubano recién 'descubierto' por los intelectuales de mi generación, escribí una novela—*Écue-Yamba-Ó!*—cuyos personajes eran negros de la clase rural de entonces. Debo advertir que crecí en el campo de Cuba en contacto con campesinos negros e hijos de campesinos negros, que, más tarde, muy interesado por las practices de la *santería* y del 'ñañiguismo', asistía a innumerables ceremonias rituales. Con esa 'documentación' escribí una novela que fue publicada en Madrid, en 1932, en pleno auge del 'nativismo' europeo. Pues bien: al cabo de veinte años de investigaciones acerca de las realidades sincréticas de Cuba, me di cuenta de que todo lo hondo, lo verdadero, lo universal, del mundo que había

[89] In this passage, Carpentier seems to acknowledge the dangers that Robin Moore sees in the *negrista* movement, writing that "[E]n esa misma afición de poetas, cineastas y novelistas, por las manifestaciones del alma afroamericana, había un peligro: el de ver transformarse en lugares communes los plantíos de algodón, los paraísos celestiales guarnecidos de sillones de barbería, tajadas de sandía y platos llenos de *custard* oloroso… Porque, en la música afroamericana, en las letras de sus cánticos, en sus coros inspirados, hay algo mucho más profundo que todo esto" (164-5).

pretendido pintar en mi novela había permanecido fuera del alcance de mi observación. ("Problemática," 14-5)

This is a very specific disavowal: Carpentier rejects his own handling of the Afro-Cuban material he tried to work with in *Écue-Yamba-Ó!* and, indeed, doubts his ability to handle that material appropriately. He does not, on the other hand, argue that he was wrong in placing it at the center of Cuban expression. Instead, Carpentier turns his self-criticism into a critique of the notion of authenticity in literature, writing that his personal example has led him to distrust any literature that pretends to present America "authentically."[90]

Similarly, Carpentier's disavowal of his "Blue" period writings hinges on his late-recognized inability to speak for US blacks—not on a change of heart about the importance or influence of African-American music. And, given the multiple jazz references in *Concierto barroco*, a very good case can be made that the music of US blacks never lost its importance to Carpentier's work, either.

What was this importance? Why did Carpentier write poems based on spirituals and the blues? Why does Louis Armstrong appear in the last pages of *Concierto barroco*? One answer, mentioned by Robin Moore in his book *Nationalizing Blackness*, might be that Carpentier saw in the international impact of African-American music a template for the possibilities of Cuban expression, and that he saw jazz as a sort of model for the potential of the *son* (172-5; 195-6). But I think we can push that observation further, and argue that Carpentier borrowed from African-American culture, especially from its music and the literature that sprang up around it. In fact, I will argue that African-American

[90] "Desde entonces desconfío, de modo cada vez más fundado, de toda una literature que solían presentarnos, hasta hace poco, como la más auténtica de América." ("Problemática, 15)

culture helped shape Carpentier's developing concept of the New World Baroque and that, therefore, we can read Carpentier as a participant in that great transfer of thought and theory between Cuba and black America that his friend Fernández de Castro worked so hard to facilitate.

The first argument is easier to make, of course, while the second will require more subtlety and speculation. But the second argument may be more significant, because it implies—in the affinities that Carpentier found between Afro-centric Cuban music and Afro-centric North American forms—a certain *barroquismo* inherent in African-American expression. Tracing these affinities, then, not only illuminates Carpentier's work, but also deepens our Neobaroque understanding of the role of music in twentieth-century African American literature.

2.3.4. Jazz as Model Art

There are two continuous currents in Carpentier's writings on African-American music: the first is his insistence that jazz represents a national resource to North American composers, and the second is his tendency to turn this observation into a lesson for Cuban writers, composers, and musicians. A very clear example of both tendencies comes from a radio address Carpentier gave in Paris in 1930, the notes from which are now housed at the FAC. The topic of the address is the *son*'s revolutionary potential—in a sense, it elaborates the ideas Carpentier suggested in so many of his *Carteles* reports. In one passage, Carpentier compares jazz and the *son* directly, declaring that the latter is the heir to the revolutionary legacy of the former:

> Y hoy, como la vitalidad de una expresión popular no es indefinida, y el caudal sonoro aportado por la música negro-americana está casi agotado, nos encontramos en el instante en que la renovación se hace necesaria… El hecho de que el Danubio Azul de Strauss disfrute de efímero renacimiento, y de que sus melodías languidas se hagan oir nuevamente en nuestros cinematógrafos y nuestros grafos y nuestros dancings, no prueba que regresamos a sentimentalismos del pasado, sino que estamos en vías de hallar otra cosa… y esta otra cosa que anhelan nuestros oidos, parece estarse produciendo en nuestras Antillas americanas… Después del auge pasajero de los bailes martiniquenses, estamos asistiendo a los primeros pasos de una invasión musical de la música cubana. ("No es afición," 4)

This "invasion," which Carpentier has already heralded in his *Carteles* columns, will center around the *son*. For evidence, Carpentier cites the *son*'s similarities with jazz. The two music forms, Carpentier notes, share a history, having been created by blacks brought to the New World as slaves. But each is entirely different from the music made in Africa. Carpentier explains that, "Sin perder las cualidades ingénitas de su raza—sentido de misterio, anhele de penetrar verdades ocultos—se creó una nueva personalidad en el suelo de Cuba, como lo hacían, en el mismo momento sus hermanos de la Louisiana y de Carolinas de Sur, en Estados Unidos" (6).

Both jazz and *son*, Carpentier continues, are impure music forms, made of elements extrinsic to the nation each comes to define. "Está invasión del mundo por el jazz," he writes, "resulta un fenómeno de los tiempos modernos que merece atraer nuestra atención, YA QUE SE TRATA DEL PRIMER CASO PRESENTADO POR LA

HISTORIA DE LA MUSICA EN QUE ELEMENTOS MUSICALES NO AUTOCTONOS COBRAN IMPORTANCIA DE VALORES REPRESENTATIVOS DE UNA RAZA." (2)

Though he takes pains to distinguish between jazz and the *son* ("nos hallamos muy lejos aquí del Jazz," he writes after playing a sample of Cuban music, 7), Carpentier also spends several paragraphs detailing an instance in which the two genres overlap. He tells his audience that the song "Peanuts," then so popular that Carpentier is sure it must be part of all of their record collections, is nothing more than another version of Cuban Moises Simón's "El manicero se va." Carpentier insists that this is a case of North America and, specifically, Hollywood, appropriating (and corrupting) a Cuban original.[91] For Carpentier, this is further proof of the irrepressible vitality and appeal of Cuban music: if it has infiltrated even jazz, that most popular and powerful of North American forms, it will surely soon hold the whole world in its thrall. This illustrates again a peculiar, and very New World baroque, notion of power, in which hegemonic appropriation is but the necessary flipside of the cultural infiltration through which a minority voice survives and makes itself heard.

Another example of the complex relationship between Carpentier's work and jazz can be seen in his lifelong fascination with George Gershwin's lyric opera *Porgy and Bess*. When he finally obtained a recording of the work, having heard only fragments before, Carpentier called it "una obra que debemos considerar con sumo respeto por cuanto es la expresión perfecta" ("Porgy and Bess" 1952, 110). He continued:

[91] "Esa canción, que conocemos bajo el título de El manicero se va... ha servido para arrullar a dos generaciones de cubanos. Ahora, los norteamericanos se han apoderado de ella, desnaturalizando sus acentos, y transformándola en un fox que no llega a fox" (5).

> Pero hay un hecho cierto: la única ópera norteamericana, de expresión netamente norteamericana, totalmente lograda, es la de Gershwin. Está escrita en *slang* sureño; su orquestra es un vasto jazz, con todas las cualidades del jazz; su argumento, su ambiente, sus personajes, corresponden a la sensibilidad, la idiosincrasia, del negro norteamericano; y el negro norteamericano, en este siglo, ha universalizado sus expresiones artísticas. Desde tal punto de vista, *Porgy and Bess* resulta una auténtica ópera nacional, como es, en su plano, *La novia vendida* de Smetana. (110)

Carpentier was positively giddy to finally see *Porgy and Bess* performed, in Paris, in March of 1953, and his descriptions of the work continued in the same vein as the above: "Y es que Gershwin, en su obra, fiel al tipo de música que siempre había sentido en lo hondo de su sensibilidad, fue el primero, en este siglo, que hizo sonar, en la escena lírica, un lenguaje específicamente norteamericana" ("*P & B* en Europa" 155). And in a glowing, two-part review of the work's Caracas debut, he wrote:

> La realidad es aquella; nosotros la ficción. Nos olvidamos del edificio, de los demás espectadores, de nosotros mismos. Lo real es aquel patio de Catfish Row, en Charleston; con sus pescadores, sus pregoneros, sus truhanes, sus comadres asomadas a las ventanas. Lo real es Porgy, el baldado; Bess, la Mujer, eje de una lucha patética entre los potencias del Bien y del Mal; Crown, encarnación de la fuerza brutal; Sporting Life, el pícaro, ondulante y artero, siempre al acecho de algo, muy merecedor del calificativo de 'serpiente' (o más exactamente; de 'rattle-snake') que Bess le le arroja al rostro, en la prodigiosa escena de la tentación. Lo real es la

> excelencia de este verdadero gran teatro, que se impuso a nuestra admiración, el martes pasado, arrancado estruendosas ovaciones a un público devuelto a sí mismo—maravillado de la aventura vivida—, al término de uno de los espetáculos más extraordinarios que hayamos aplaudido en estos últimos años. ("Porgy and Bess" 1955, 431)

These are not isolated references—*Porgy and Bess* comes up over and over in Carpentier's critical writings, and he repeatedly praises the work along with Gershwin's "unstudied" talent.[92] But what's important for our purposes is the specific nature of Carpentier's praise: in almost every article and review, Carpentier describes *Porgy and Bess* as a national achievement. It is "una envergadura nacional" ("Ópera negra" 424), "una suerte de ópera nacional norteamericana" ("*P & B* en Europa" 155), and "una ópera de auténtico acento nacional" ("Porgy and Bess" 1952, 195). And he also repeatedly praises the work's merging of "high" and "low" forms or, more precisely, its elevation of a popular expression (jazz) to the level of *música culta*. His praise for the opera thus parallels his praise for Roldán ("Obras como los *Tres pequeños poemas* de Amadeo Roldán nos ofrecen visiones poderosas y certreras de una alta música cubana, creada con los más auténticos elementos vernáculos")("Amadeo Roldán," 85).

Carpentier's praise for *Porgy and Bess* thus falls into the pattern that characterizes most of his writing on jazz. In short, his enthusiasm for Gershwin's music is related to his goals for Cuban music, and the incorporation of jazz into modern literature and "high" symphonic music gave Carpentier a notion of what could be achieved, by Cubans, with

[92] Somewhat contradictorily, Carpentier celebrates Gershwin's native, primitive and raw talent, arguing that his achievement with *Porgy and Bess* came without effort ("Opera negra," 423); but he also notes that, before composing his work, Gershwin spent months studying Wagner's *Meistersingers* (424).

the *son*. Jazz serves as a model for the *son*, as it does in Carpentier's 1930 radio address, and in his articles on Don Azpiazu and Rita Montaner in Paris.[93]

2.3.5. Jazz in the New World Baroque

Again, Carpentier's interest in African-American culture extended beyond using it as a model for expressing Cuban identity. The poems of his "Blue" period indicate that Carpentier was probably familiar with James Weldon Johnson's *Book of American Negro Spirituals*, which became the definitive study of the subject on its publication in 1925. Carpentier could have come across the book through Fernández de Castro, or possibly through Johnson's friend, the Mexican illustrator Miguel Covarrubias, an important figure in the Harlem Renaissance who came to Havana in 1926 with letters of introduction for Carpentier and Fernández de Castro.

The connection is important since the preface of Johnson's book presents a theory of music and race that foreshadows, in many respects, Carpentier's writings on the subject. Like Carpentier, Johnson places black expression at the center of his nation's cultural identity—a move that he will pronounce even further in his *New Age* editorials, writing that White American musicians "have created nothing which has made an impression on the world. In the meantime, the only contribution to music which this county has made that has received universal acknowledgement owes its creation to

[93] About the latter, Carpentier wrote, "Cuando canta una melodía afrocubana, nos convence, como nos convencía Aida Ward, cuando vocalizaba las frases de sus *blues*" ("Nuevas ofensivas del cubanismo" 92).

Negroes" ("American Music," 287).[94] Like Carpentier, he locates black contributions in the polyphonic rhythms and "bizarre" harmonies of their music. Just as Carpentier emphasizes the hybrid and transcultural nature of Afro-Cuban music, Johnson highlights those characteristics in the black spirituals. Finally, Carpentier and Johnson both highlight the "unwriteability" of black music. "I doubt that it is possible with our present system of notation," Johnson writes, "to make a fixed transcription of these peculiarities that would be absolutely true; for in their very nature they are not susceptible to fixation" (30). Johnson ties this opacity directly to race, writing that "It is upon this point that most white people have difficulty with Negro music, the difficulty of getting the 'swing' of it" (28). Carpentier does the same, again using jazz as a source of comparison, when he writes about the development of the *contradanza* in *La música en Cuba*:

> Certain *contradanzas* 'had greater appeal' when played by blacks. Blacks and whites performed the same popular songs. But blacks added an accent, a vitality, something unwritten that 'perked things up.' In short, what happened was something similar to what makes Duke Ellington's orchestra more appealing than Paul Whiteman's. The black musician was elusive, inventing between the written notes. White musicians stuck to the notation. (158)

All of these elements point to what Johnson finally labels the "miracle" of the appearance of black music in the Americas. Johnson's "miracle" specifically refers to the improbability of a class of people so oppressed—stripped of their

[94] Of course, Carpentier echoes this point precisely in his insistence that "el negro norteamericana, en este siglo, ha universalizado sus expresiones artísticas" ("*Porgy and Bess*," 1952, 110).

home, their language, and their means of education—producing anything so sublime as the Spirituals he records in his book.[95] Johnson is clear that he doesn't believe the Spirituals are, in fact, a miracle, writing instead, "And their production, although seemingly miraculous, can be accounted for naturally" (17). But a significant portion of that accounting, Johnson claims, can be found in the exceptional faith of black people in the New World. In this way, Johnson's text prefigures Carpentier's development of the "marvelous real," which he, too, attributed to the New World's strong faith, and which he claimed arises "from an unexpected alteration of reality (the miracle), from a privileged revelation of reality, an unaccustomed insight that is singularly favored by the unexpected richness of reality or an amplification of the scale and categories of reality…" ("Marvelous Real in America," 86).

2.4 Jazz is the Baroque Concert: *Concierto barroco*

Carpentier's sixth novel, *Concierto barroco* (1974), continues exploring the themes that animated the author's previous work. The novel concerns a wealthy Mexican landowner who travels to Europe with a black servant named Filomeno, hired during a ship-repairing stop in Santiago de Cuba. While in Venice, the two Americans chance upon a marvelous (and possibly historical) meeting between Antonio Vivaldi, George Frederick Handel, and Domenico Scarlatti. After attending a rehearsal of Vivaldi's New World-

[95] Johnson's argument thus dovetails with Carpentier's specific examples of marvelous American reality, especially that of "King Henri Christophe, from Haiti, a cook who becomes the emperor of an island and who, believing one fine day that Napoleon is going to reconquer the island, constructs a fabulous fortress where he and all of his dignitaries, ministers, soldiers, troops could resist a siege of ten years' duration" ("Baroque and the Marvelous Real," 105).

themed opera *Motezuma*, the five men participate in a wild, improvisatory jam session at the *Ospedale della Pietà,* after which the novel becomes a time-jumping fantasy: the morning following the jam session, twenty years have passed in one night; soon, the eighteenth-century composers are visiting Stravinsky's grave and Filomeno is heading off to see Louis Armstrong.

The novel, then, treats a number of Carpentier's favorite subjects, foremost among them the interaction of New World and Old World cultures. At first glance, Filomeno appears to be a reworking of previous black Carpentier characters, including Panchón in "Oficio de tinieblas" and Ti Noël in *El reino de este mundo*. And, like all of Carpentier's work, *Concierto barroco* is intensely musical. It is certainly one of the works in which Carpentier attempted to transpose musical form into literature; several critics (among them Acero and Pelegrín) have mapped musical forms onto the novel in studies we will explore in the following pages. And with good reason: from the title, through the novel's invocation from Psalm 81, and on to the book's first lines, with their lyrical repetition ("De plata los delgados cuchillos, los finos tenedores, de plata los platos donde un árbol de plata labrada en la concavidad de sus platas recogía el jugo"), the author makes plain the fact that he is presenting his readers with a musical performance.

At the same time, the novel differs substantially from Carpentier's previous work, most notably in what Gonzalo Celorio calls its "uncharacteristic sense of humor." But Celorio writes of the novel not as a *break* from the rest of Carpentier's *oeuvre*, but instead as a *breakthrough*. Specifically, he reads the novel as the convergence of Carpentier's two "chief contributions" to the Latin American novel: the marvelous real and the development of New World Baroque theory. In this convergence, Carpentier's

continued thinking on the New World Baroque recuperates his (heretofore flawed) concept of the marvelous real.

Though Celorio does not speculate on the causes of this convergence, there is reason to think that, while Carpentier had long been thinking about and writing on the baroque nature of Latin American culture, by the 1970s his thinking would have undergone an evolution. After all, 1974 also saw the publication of Severo Sarduy's *Barroco*, which followed "The Baroque and Neobaroque" (1972) and *Big Bang* (1973). Zamora and Kaup read "The Baroque and Neobaroque" as a direct response to Carpentier's writings on the New World Baroque, particularly to Carpentier's grounding of baroque characteristics in nature rather than artifice (265-6). Although Rafael Rojas insists that, "For his part, Carpentier does not seem to have interested himself in the work of Severo Sarduy" (86),[96] *Concierto barroco* does seem to incorporate some elements of Sarduy's New World Baroque discourse.

For example, as Zamora and Kaup write, "For Sarduy, the Baroque sign is conventional and without any direct link to extralinguistic referents; for Carpentier, on the contrary, the relations of analogy and resemblance that underlie the realism of *his* Baroque perform the task of naming New World realities" (266). The result is a playfulness in Sarduy's work that is largely absent from Carpentier's writing before *Concierto barroco*. But the distinction does not hold up in *Concierto barroco*: in that novel, part of the newfound sense of humor that Celorio identifies is revealed in Sarduyan linguistic play of signifiers and signified. In the Ospedale della Pietà, for example, Vivaldi begins naming the orphan girls as they enter the salon, attaching each to

[96] "Por su parte, Carpentier no parece haberse interesado en la obra de Severo Sarduy."

the instrument she plays. "Y poco a poco," Carpentier writes, "como eran setenta, y el Maestro Antonio, por lo bebido, confundía unas huérfanas con otras, los nombres de éstas se fueron reduciendo al del instrument que tocaban. Como si las muchachas no tuviesen otra personalidad, cobrando vida en sonido, las señalaba con el dedo: *Clavicémbalo… Viola da brazzo… Oboe… Basso di gamba… Flauto… Organo di legno… Regale… Violino all francese… Tromba marina… Trombone…"* (42).

The girls' individuality is reduced to sounds connected only to their arbitrary choice of musical instrument—and even those names get mixed up by Vivaldi. On the one hand, this has to be noted as an example of Carpentier's unfortunate tendency to treat his female characters as interchangeable, a tendency made all the worse by their voicelessness in the text.[97] Something similar has already occurred in the novel, in Chapter 3, when el Amo and Filomeno carouse with *madrileña* prostitutes dressed as shepherdesses, rechristened with pastoral names like Filis, Lucinda, and Cloris. On the other hand, renaming, and the arbitrariness of names, are themes that Carpentier extends throughout the novel. Most obviously, the Mexican is referred to by three names, none of which is his actual name: el Amo, Montezuma, and el indiano. The three maestros are renamed throughout the text, too: Handel, for example, is "el sajón"; Vivaldi is "el veneziano" and "el Fraile Pelirrojo," a name that comes, like the Mexican's "Montezuma," from his carnival costume. The Sarduyan techniques of substitution (renaming) and proliferation abound in the text, but in this novel much more than in

[97] Consuelo Navarro (2001) connects Carpentier to a line of masculinist Latin American writers who present "una visión monolítica del mestizaje que marginaliza, silencia, o deforma la participación femenina" (365). For more on Carpentier's treatment of his women characters, see Kutzinski (1993), Millington (1996) and Heller (1997).

Carpentier's previous works, they are accompanied by Sarduyan themes of disguise and transvestism.[98]

This linguistic play contributes to an overall atmosphere of play that, Celorio suggests, helps Carpentier overcome the problematic nature of his writing on the marvelous real. For Celorio, Carpentier's marvelous real comes from an outsider's perspective, the result of an exoticizing gaze. If Carpentier had truly identified with American reality, Celorio charges, he would not have described that reality as the "marvelous real"—instead, he would just have called it "real." Celorio writes:

> In the prologue to *Kingdom* [*of this World*], as we see in the above passage, Carpentier writes that the marvelous is derived from an unexpected alteration of reality, which is *paired with an exalted spirit* by the miracle believer. This would seem to call into question its supposed objectivity, and whether the condition that Carpentier attributes to America is as objective as he maintains. To the contrary, mightn't it be that this condition occurs when the gaze of an outsider (in this case a European) falls on our reality and, seeing that it doesn't fit the paradigms of the Old World, pronounces it marvelous, as has happened since the time of Columbus?

[98] This latter theme appears in the novel's version of Vivaldi's operatic retelling of the conquest of Mexico, in which the composer turns one of Moctezuma's generals, Teutile, into the emperor's daughter, who later marries Hernán Cortés's (fictional) brother, Ramiro. But gender-bending appears earlier in the text too, as in Filomeno's musings, in Chapter 2, on the sexual activities of King Ferdinand of Spain: "… y en esto de líos de alcoba nadie, en fin de cuentas, sabe quién monta a quién" (21). For a longer consideration of transvestism in Carpentier, see Pancrazio, James. *The Logic of Fetishism: Alejo Carpentier and the Cuban Tradition*. Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell U P (2004).

The fact that Carpentier sees American reality as marvelous is, in itself, proof that he identifies with the colonizer rather than the colonized.

But Celorio argues that Carpentier finally breaks free from this perspective in *Concierto barroco*:

> In very simple words, the Mexican explains to Filomeno the essence of the poetics of the marvelous real: 'Our world seems like a fable to people *over there* because they've lost their sense of the fabulous. They call everything *fabulous* that is remote, irrational, that belongs to yesterday' (123). Note that in this explanation, the author, perhaps inadvertently, speaks through the Mexican, placing the provenance of the 'fabulous' (an adjective certainly closely related to 'marvelous') not in the intrinsic reality of our continent, as he maintains in his theory, but in the distance of Europe from America—a view that certainly relates to Carpentier's own perspective.

Celorio wonders whether this shift is inadvertent, but it is of a piece with the rest of the novel's parodic tone. By 1974, Carpentier is able to mock even his own views.

To illustrate Carpentier's move away from his own Eurocentrism, we might consider the ways that European culture appears in the novel. On one hand, Celorio rightly points out that, while *Concierto barroco* treats the "familiar duality" of Old World and New that runs through all of the Cuban's work, in this novel Carpentier complicates the dichotomy. That is, rather than merely recapitulate his typical, Spenglerian juxtaposition of a tired Europe against a vital, lively America—a juxtaposition that, Salgado (1999) argues, gives birth to Carpentier's thinking on the New World

Baroque[99]—in *Concierto barroco* Carpentier hints at two societies of equal vitality *and* decadence. In several places in the novel, Carpentier mocks his own Spenglerian views: first, in the novel's opulent descriptions of the Mexican's opulent silver possessions, descriptions so excessive that, as Celorio points out, they "could have come directly from the European imagination." Similarly, the comparison of New World food to Old World food is so predictable that it must be read as parody:

> De cocina no podía hablarse: ante las albóndigas presentes, la monotonía de las merluzas, evocaba el mexicano la sutileza de los peces guachinangos y las pompas del guajolote vestido de salsas obscuras con aroma de chocolate y calores de mil pimientas; ante las berzas de cada día, las alubias desabridas, el garbanzo y la col, cantaba el negro los méritos del aguacate pescuezudo y tierno, de los bulbos de malanga que, rociados de vinagre, perejil y ajo, venían a las mesas de su país, escoltados por cangrejos cuyas bocas de carnes leonadas tenían más sustancia que los solomos de estas tierras. (27-8)

And Carpentier undercuts the comparison with appetizing descriptions of the food served at the Ospedale della Pietà after the musicians' jam session.[100] In place of a tendentious duality of Old and New World, in other words, Carpentier offers hybridity. "[In

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[99] Specifically, Salgado traces the appearance of the Spenglerian notion of the "depreciation of 'decadent,' late European splendor in favor of the merits of the more 'robust' American constructions" in art critic Pál Keleman's 1951 book *Baroque and Rococo in Latin America* which, he writes, deeply influenced Carpentier. Salgado notes the similarities between Keleman's disillusionment with World War II-era Europe and that expressed by the narrator of *Los pasos perdidos* (320-2).

[100] "La hermana tornera apareció con dos cestas repletas de ensaimadas, quesos, panes de rosca y medialuna, confituras de membrillo, castañas abrillantadas y mazapanes con forma de cochinillos rosados, sobre los que asomaban los golletes varias botellas de vino romañola: 'Para que desayunen por el camino'" (47-8).

Concierto barroco] Carpentier focuses on the confluence of American and European elements, without which there would be no concert," writes Celorio.

On the other hand, Carpentier *does* represent a meeting of European and American cultures and, in this meeting, European culture certainly comes away devalued. This is especially apparent when the novel is compared with, for example, *El acoso*. The shift between the two books is noteworthy: in *Concierto barroco*, Carpentier no longer seeks to revitalize Western forms with American elements; now he's advocating merging Western forms with American ones. And, in this merging, American (or, more precisely, African-derived American) elements often take the lead. Thus Louis Armstrong is treated with more reverence than Handel, Scarlatti, or Vivaldi, and thus the jam session, orchestrated by Vivaldi, becomes a showcase for Filomeno. "Diablo de negro!" complains Vivaldi. "Cuando quiero llevar un compás, él me impone el suyo. Acabaré tocando música de caníbales" (47).

Celorio's essay (remarkably) avoids the question of race, but it's an issue that's inextricable from both the Cuban national and Latin American hemispheric identities Carpentier seeks to establish. Celorio notes that Carpentier's development of the marvelous real came after a research visit to Haiti, when Carpentier was amazed at the collective faith he found in nation's inhabitants and which, again, he believed reflected a reality separate from that perceived by Enlightenment-tinged, Western, European culture. But, while Celorio pokes fun at Carpentier's status—as a Swiss-born, French-educated writer-in-exile—as an outsider to Latin American culture, he elides the fact that this outsider status pertained as surely to Carpentier's race as to his national origin. The "collective faith" that impresses Carpentier is the faith of Haiti's black inhabitants, and in

El reino de este mundo he poses it against not only French subjects like Pauline Bonaparte and General LeClerc, but also against the island's white creole elite. Of course, this faith that Carpentier claimed as inherent to "our" America was one into which he was born an outsider. Carpentier recognized this as early as the 1940s, which contributed to his embarrassed repudiation of his own *negrista* beginnings. As part of this repudiation, Carpentier moved Afro-Cuban cultural elements into the background of his novels in the 1950s and 1960s, but with *Concierto barroco* they return to the forefront. This time, though, Carpentier engages black cultural forms with a self-consciousness that was lacking in his "Blue" period, in *Écue-Yamba-Ó!* and his Afro-Cuban collaborations, and even in *El reino de este mundo*.

All of this results in a greater centrality for black expression that avoids the appropriation that plagued Carpentier's earlier works. Carpentier signals this shift in Filomeno's retelling of Silvestre de Balboa's Bayamo story, which locates a black Cuban at the heart of the nation's mythology. The shift extends to the novel's structure. If *El acoso* held in tension the sonata, sonata form, and Beethoven's Third Symphony, then *Concierto barroco* operates with a similarly hybrid music-based structure. But whereas *El acoso* is a play of European forms, *Concierto barroco* is a play of *concerto grosso* and *son*, with the latter giving the text its impetus, its tone, its notable characteristics (humor, freedom), and the former merely providing a veneer of respectability.

Marina Gálvez Acero, in her study of the novel's structure, takes the author's word that the text's performance is, in fact, a Baroque one. She neatly lays out the progression as parallel to that of the Baroque *concerto grosso*, with three sections (*allegro*, *adagio*, and a more free-form one that she identifies as a *suite*) and a coda. She

sees Filomeno and the Master as the composition's two solo instruments—the Master, she says, can be considered a piano, while Filomeno's function moves between that of trumpet and a percussive role. Europe functions as the orchestral mass. The concerto's freer final section, she argues, allows room for new solo voices, and there we have "el violín de Vivaldi, el órgano de Haendel, y el clavicémbalo de Scarlatti" (542).

While Acero's division of *Concierto barroco* into this *concerto grosso* form is convincing, other critics see the work dividing itself into halves. An eight chapter book, the middle chapters (Four and Five) coincide with a rupture in the novel's time, what Alegría calls an axis, a moment in which it becomes possible "romper los márgenes artificialmente sólidos del tiempo y de integrar el pasado, el presente, y el porvenir en una duración" (qtd in Mocega-González 259). Before those chapters, the narrative proceeds in a straightforward, chronologically linear fashion: afterwards, time is unstrung. If we divide the novel into two sections instead of Acero's three sections and a coda, we get something very much akin to Carpentier's description of the *son*. In *La música en Cuba*, Carpentier says that a typical *son* composition consists of two parts: the *largo* and the *montuno*. The *largo*, according to Carpentier, is "the initial recitative, the exposition of the ballad, anciently rooted and Santiago-based, in a deliberate time" (230). The second part, the *montuno*, is freer and more improvised. It is initiated by the "nervous reaction of the percussion" (231), after which all of the piece's musical voices may enter together. Robbins is even more specific: "In all two-part *sones* or hybrids, the first part is sung by the *cantante primero*; the *segundo* may harmonize. The presence of a *coro*, where other musicians and members of the audience may sing, is reserved for the second part and serves to distinguish it" (190).

If we view the meeting of Filomeno, Montezuma, and the Maestros, and the jam session that follows, as an axis between *largo* and *montuno*, we can explain the novel's shift from deliberate, linear time to the freed time of the second half. We can also explain the shift in voices that Acero saw as the opening of the Baroque *suite*: the Master serves as the *primero cantante* of the *largo* section and Filomeno is his harmonizing *segundo*. As Filomeno shifts, in that middle section, into the percussive role that Acero ascribes to him, he ushers in the *coro* as he frees the novel from its initial recitative. An important point in that shift is the diminution, in the *montuno*, of the Master's voice, and the concurrent prominence of Filomeno's. The simultaneous musical structures of *Concierto barroco* thus anticipate and enact the novel's conclusion, in which Filomeno liberates himself from his servitude.

Writing about *Los pasos perdidos*, Mark Millington focuses on a passage in which the narrator, a composer, expresses a desire to combine polyphonic and harmonic writing:

> …pensaba yo lograr una coexistencia de la escritura polifónica y de la tipo armónico, concertadas, machihembradas, según las leyes más auténticas de la música, dentro de una oda vocal y sinfónica, en constante aumento de intensidad expresiva, cuya concepción general era, por lo pronto, bastante sensata (223)

Millington writes that such music would have contradictory aims, since polyphony "involves combining independent voices in counterpoint," where harmonic music features one melodic line complemented by other lines or voices. "The key issue," Millington writes, "would be whether such a compositional fusion would be possible"

(366). Insofar as Carpentier seeks to accomplish something analogous in his novel, Millington declares him a failure. *Los pasos perdidos*, Millington claims, is simply harmonic. He writes:

> In fact, the narrator perfectly describes the dominant format of the novel which *is* organized around a dominant voice: the narrator's own. And one might call that an harmonic (or monological) arrangement. There *are* multiple texts and references in *Los pasos perdidos*, but the question is: how are they deployed? The answer appears to me to be that they are deployed almost always within the mastering discourse of one voice. (366-7)

This critique would be hard to apply to *El acoso*, which reflects Carpentier's growing embrace of Joycean coexisting contraries. But it is impossible to sustain against *Concierto barroco*, in which the "mastering discourse of one voice" is cast off on both the level of the plot, by Filomeno, and on the level of composition, via the novel's camouflaged *son* structure.

Concierto barroco, like *El acoso*, camouflages suppressed musical forms within Western art music. As such, it continues the Joycean influence of Sirens that we noted in this chapter's early pages. But, since the internal, camouflaged form is, in fact, an Afro-Cuban one, it also offers a partial answer to Benitez-Rojo's comment that, in Carpentier's fiction, "Elegua-Eshu did not descend gloriously on the holy drumbeat as he should have, but rather he came in the form of a hollow allegory, invoked by a Western voice that did not sing out *bembé*, but played chamber music instead" (237).

This is what Celorio means when he calls *Concierto barroco* a "rich, inventive, liberating" novel, and when he writes that "from the moment that the Mexican, watching the rehearsal of *Motezuma*, identifies with the conquered rather than the conquerors, cultural emancipation is announced and the road toward liberty is opened." The novel ends with Louis Armstrong striking up "I Can't Give You Anything But Love, Baby"—the same song that, in 1929, Carpentier applauded furiously when he saw it performed in Paris as a part of Lew Leslie's *Blackbirds Review*. Carpentier's review of that performance was the one in which he described the performers as moving like mischievous, carefree children, and it came within months of his proclamation that "Ha muerto el jazz! Que viva el son!" But in *Concierto barroco*, African-descendant music forms are no longer material for a New World Baroque concert; rather, they *are* the "nuevo concierto barroco" (83). With *Concierto barroco*, then, Carpentier does not drag us back into that past; instead, the appearance of the song shows how far Carpentier has come.

Chapter 3:

Golomón in OKC: Ralph Ellison's Prairie Baroque

3.1 Introduction: Ralph Ellison, the Baroque, and the Jazz Matrix

3.1.1 Baker's Baroque-Blues Reading of *Invisible Man*

At the end of his analysis of *Invisible Man*'s Trueblood episode in his 1984 book *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature*, Houston A. Baker compares Ellison's performance in the chapter to Diego Velazquez's 1656 masterpiece *Las Meninas*. Quoting Barbara Babcock-Abrahams, Baker says Ellison is "'conscious of being self-conscious of himself' as artist" (198). Specifically, Baker evokes what John Rupert Martin calls Velazquez's aim of "break[ing] down the barrier between the work of art and the real world," achieved by "conceiv[ing] of the subject represented as existing in a space coextensive with that of the observer" (156). About *Las Meninas*, Martin writes:

> In *Las Meninas*, a work aptly described by Luca Giordano as 'the theology of painting,' Velazquez puts himself in the company of the Infanta Margarita and her attendants, as if to offer visible proof of the nobility of art. Standing before a large canvas with palette and brushes in hand, the artist looks at the figures of King Philip IV and his queen, Mariana of Austria, who, since we see them reflected in the mirror on the rear wall, must be assumed to be standing in the picture. By thus conjuring up

> presences both within and outside the painting, Velazquez creates a psychological as well as a spatial tension between the work of art and the beholder. (167-8)

For Baker, the Velazquez-esque work appears in the ability Ellison shares with artists who can "detach themselves from, survive, and laugh at their initial experiences of otherness" (198). In relation to Velázquez, Martin says that it is a characteristically baroque technique. But Baker's gloss of the Trueblood incident is not intended as a baroque reading of the chapter; instead, he calls it a blues reading. Baker repeatedly links Trueblood's detachment and self-consciousness to the "public theatricality" of the blues (194), finally concluding that in both Trueblood's narration and his own writing, Ellison presents "an artist who is fully aware of the contours and limitation, the rewards and dilemmas, of the Afro-American's uniquely expressive craft" (198).

Baker's Velazquez comparison is not, however, the only place where his writing on *The Invisible Man* suggests characterizations of the baroque, especially in the New World forms that we have explored in previous chapters. For example, in Chapter 1 of this study, we noted that Michael Feith calls the trope of the mirror one of "the games of being and seeming, surface illusions, simulacra and disguises," that characterizes the "textbook baroque," and he writes that in the baroque "the confusion between being and seeming is inseparable from the topos of the topsy-turvy world: the mask produces reversal and inversion." Feith is echoing Sarduy, who traces the mirror trope back to Baroque linguistics: "Baroque language, re-elaborated by the double-work of elision, acquires, as does the language of delirium, the quality of a metallic surface, a reflector

without an apparent other side, in which the signifiers … seem to be reflected in themselves, to refer to themselves, to be degraded into empty signs" (306).

Baker, in turn, writes, "What Ellison achieves in the Trueblood episode is a dizzying hall of mirrors, a redundancy of structure, that enables him to extend the value of Afro-American folk forms by combining them with an array of Western narrative forms and tropes" (198). That is a striking sentence: it suggests the Baroque in its first clause, coincides with baroque notions of the uses of redundancy in its second, and recalls Lezama's formulation of the subversive aims of the New World Baroque in its third. Elsewhere, Baker writes in still more ways that recall New World Baroque theory, evoking, for example, the eroticism of the Trueblood episode (exemplified in its ubiquitous phallic imagery) (180-5), its "artful evasion and expressive illusion" (196), its parodic nature and its linguistic play. Looking at all of these overlaps between the baroque and Baker's reading of Ellison, the question I foregrounded in my first three chapters reappears: how much can we make of these similarities? Are they merely parallels?

It was easier to answer the latter question in the negative when we looked at Johnson and Carpentier, given Johnson's multiple connections to Latin America and Carpentier's conscious modeling of his idea for the potential for New World Baroque art on the globe-conquering force of African American music. For his part, Ellison seems to have recognized a "Spanish tinge" running through African American expression. "We forget," he wrote, "that our language is such a flexible instrument because it has had so many dissonances thrown into it—from Africa, from Mexico, from Spain, from, God knows, everywhere" ("The Novel as a Function of American Democracy" 316-17). Yet

we won't find the type of explicit connections to Latin America that shaped Johnson's writing in Ellison's biography. In this chapter, then, Ellison's novel will serve as a sort of laboratory, a space in which to explore just how far we can push our thesis. Can we find a baroque, Spanish tinge, in Ellison's 1952 novel? And if so, what will that tell us about the interaction of race, nation, and music in *Invisible Man*?

I hope I have laid a foundation in previous chapters by showing, first, that baroque Latin American expression and African American expression are, in some measure, inseparable. There is no bright line we can draw between the two: each influenced the other, and both were developed side-by-side by cosmopolitan communities in "crucible" cities like New Orleans, New York, Havana, and Paris. Second, I hope I have shown "the baroque," and especially the New World baroque, can be read as a way-of-being in the world, more than just a style, as a stance taken in the relationship between power and [abjection] that springs inevitably from the collision of cultures that accompanied, first, the Europeans' arrival in the Americas and, subsequently, the introduction of African slaves into the newly conquered lands.

With that foundation laid, we can turn to the parallels. Specifically, in the early pages of this chapter we will explore several characteristics that *Invisible Man* shares with the Baroque: its meta-literariness and intertextuality, its emphasis on play and parody, and the Velazquez-esque rupturing of the plane that Baker notes in his reading of the Trueblood episode. We will examine these characteristics as they appear in the scene immediately following the Trueblood episode, *Invisible Man*'s Golden Day scene from Chapter 3, and find them outlined in Ellison's essay, "Going to the Territory" (1980). Our objective will be to put Ellison in conversation with the authors previously considered in

this study, especially Carpentier, whose clearest literary statement on the New World Baroque, *Concierto barroco*, finds meaning, like *Invisible Man*, in the figure and music of Louis Armstrong.

This chapter will offer, in other words, an inversion of Baker's analysis: a baroque reading of Ellison that will overlap with and complement the many jazz- and blues-based readings that critics have performed on *Invisible Man*. It makes sense, then, to consider several of those readings at the outset of our investigation, so that we may see how a New World baroque analysis of the novel can add to our understanding of the work's vision of race and nation.

3.1.2 Jazz Readings of *Invisible Man*

Numerous critics have addressed the question of what African American music does in *Invisible Man*, a book where jazz plays a prominent role, written by a man for whom jazz was both a potent symbol and a lifelong fascination. Like Carpentier, Joyce, and Johnson, Ellison was musically inclined. He spent his childhood in Oklahoma City where, according to his accounts in "Going to the Territory" and "Living with Music," he studied classical music under the tutelage of a beloved music teacher, Zelia Breaux, and learned jazz from the old veterans who drilled his school's marching band. Ellison depicts the Oklahoma City of his childhood as a hotbed of jazz innovation, a key node on the Southwestern jazz circuit, where musicians such as Lester Young would regularly play with locals. Ellison numbered among his childhood friends the guitarist Charlie Christian and claims he grew up hearing Jimmy Rushing's voice ringing through his

neighborhood ("Remembering Jimmy" 273-7). In 1933, he left Oklahoma to study music at the Tuskegee Institute, where he met concert pianist Hazel Harrison, whose influence on his artistic development he would describe in "Little Man at Chehaw Station" (1977).

Though at Tuskegee Ellison would immerse himself in studies of literature and visual arts and, within two years, leave the institute for New York, his early foundation in musical studies shaped both his thinking and his literary production. And just as Johnson was fascinated with the possible implications of ragtime, the spirituals, and other African American music forms for African American cultural expression as a whole, Ellison saw jazz as a prism through which to interpret African American experience and, indeed, American experience as a whole. In this, Ellison's essays on music parallel the writing of Amiri Baraka who, then writing as LeRoi Jones, took blues-derived black music forms as culture-defining models in *Blues People*. Ellison, in fact, contested Baraka's claims that the development of jazz from its early blues forms into swing and then bebop and free jazz represented a move towards a black nationalism, a conscious (and militant) recovery of African musical time sense held in opposition to Western, linear senses of time. Instead, Ellison emphasized jazz's role as a mediator between African and Western cultural expressions.[101] Though this disagreement was vehement, it was essentially one of emphasis—Baraka agreed that jazz incorporated Western concepts, and Ellison (as we'll see) saw a subversive purpose to this incorporation. And Ellison used struggle, opposition and war as a central metaphor for his descriptions of how jazz progressed, both in individual compositions and as an art form.

[101] cf. "Blues People," *The New York Review*, February 6, 1964.

It becomes imperative, then, to read *Invisible Man* keeping in mind Ellison's enthusiasm for jazz and his insistence on its cultural importance for African Americans. Indeed, in the novel's prologue the narrator tells readers to think of his story as a jazz work, comparing it to Louis Armstrong's "(What Did I Do to Be So) Black and Blue." Armstrong, the narrator says, "made poetry out of being invisible" (6). The narrator's comparison of himself to a jazz artist reappears in Chapter 5, when he recalls his time as an orator and debater at his southern black college:

> …listen to me, the bungling bugler of words, imitating the trumpet and the trombone's timber, playing thematic variations like a baritone horn. Hey! old connoisseur of voice's sounds, of voices without messages, of newsless winds, listen to the vowel sounds the crackling dentals, to the low harsh gutturals of empty anguish, now riding the curve of a preacher's rhythm I heard long ago in a Baptist church…" (88)

Washington noted that in Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* music and words (in the forms of both literature and oratory) often stand in for one another; similarly, many critics have linked *Invisible Man*'s references to music to the narrator's stated goal of finding a voice for himself (Anderson, Spaulding). It's a comparison Ellison himself frequently made regarding his writing. In his revised Introduction for the 1981 edition of the novel, for example, the author wrote that he understood his task as "improvis[ing] upon materials in the manner of a jazz musician" (xxiii).

Accordingly, several critics have offered readings of *Invisible Man* that treat jazz as the novel's operative metaphor, including Gayl Jones (1991), Horace Porter (2000), Wilfried Raussert (2000), Michael Magee (2003), and Paul Allen Anderson (2005). To

those studies we can add a number of critics who treat the novel as a "blues" text, including Raymond Olderman (1966) and Baker. A. Timothy Spaulding (2004) argues that, whereas the notion of *Invisible Man* as a jazz (or blues) novel is now pervasive in Ellison criticism, many of these studies merely treat the novel's musicality as merely a matter of tone or attitude, or its approach to experimentation. Spaulding claims, though, that the novel's jazziness can be read even into Ellison's literary techniques, highlighting in particular the bebop techniques of "quoting," "harmonic variation," and "asymmetrical phrasing," which he claims find parallels in Ellison's writing.[102] In that sense, *Invisible Man* parallels the texts considered so far in this study, especially "Sirens," *El acoso*, and *Concierto barroco*.

Wilfried Saussert's "Jazz, Time and Narrativity" further connects *Invisible Man* to the arguments developed in our previous chapters. Saussert argues that jazz appears in the novel most obviously as a marker of an alternative, and anti-progressive, conception of time. Borrowing Berndt Ostendorf's term, he calls jazz a "musical creole" which is uniquely African American in that it "unfolds itself as the result of the encounter of Western and African time conceptions in the United States" (519). In particular, Saussert writes, "The rhythmic quality of jazz has come to be seen as a musical expression of time conceptions which create the impression that past and future coexist at the same time" (522). Saussert finds this complicated time conception at work in multiple examples throughout Ellison's novel, including the prologue, the novel's Harlem riot scene, and the narrator's various dream sequences and hallucinations.

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[102] At the risk of belaboring the parallels between Ellison's work and the techniques explored by New World Baroque theorists, it is worth mentioning that Sarduy lists "Quotation" as one form of Neobaroque intertextuality ("Baroque and Neobaroque" 282-3). [Elaborate what that term means to each!]

For Raussert, then, jazz serves the function in *Invisible Man* that Barnhart ascribes to ragtime in *The Autobiography*: that is, it introduces a vernacular sense of time, a challenge to the "official," linear, Western sense of time that dominates classical European music. As noted in Chapter 1, that challenge can be read as a manifestation of a common impulse in what Wilks terms "alternative black modernisms," an impulse that—following Kaup—we can say also characterizes baroque expressions in the New World.

As with the critical readings we considered of "Sirens" and *El acoso*, jazz readings of *Invisible Man* are strikingly discordant. Critics variously describe the novel's chief musical influence as blues (Olderman, Baker), swing (Anderson), bebop (Spaulding), and free jazz (Saussert, Bell).[103] Anderson contends that Ellison wrote critically about bebop, pointing specifically to the author's contrasting profiles of Louis Armstrong and Charlie Parker.[104] For Anderson, Ellison's appreciation of jazz has to be understood in relation to his devotion to the jazz tradition, represented by Armstrong. The great bebop artists like Parker, Anderson claims, were too dismissive of that tradition and, as a result, failed to find an authentic jazz voice. Spaulding seems to argue the opposite, claiming, in fact, that Ellison found a model for his writing in bebop, in particular in "its merger of the relentless exploration characteristic of modern jazz improvisation with an adherence to the irrepressible elements of swing and the blues"

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[103] More precisely, Saussert and Bell suggest that *Invisible Man* anticipates free jazz, since the recordings that establish that genre, such as Ornette Coleman's *Tomorrow is the Question!* (1958) and *The Shape of Jazz to Come* (1959), and Charles Mingus' *Pithecanthropus Erectus* (1956), come after the novel's publication.

[104] Ellison writes most thoroughly about Parker in "The Golden Age, Time Past" (1959) and "On Bird, Bird-Watching, and Jazz" (1962). His writings on Armstrong are spread across a number of essays, notably "The Golden Age, Time Past" and "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke" (1958) and, as part of his "portrait," Anderson also considers Ellison's use of Armstrong in *Invisible Man*.

(483). But Spaulding's critique is less a contradiction of Anderson's thesis than a complication of it, as the end of that sentence indicates. While Spaulding emphasizes Ellison's receptivity to bebop, pointing in particular to his nostalgic rendering of bebop's early days in "The Golden Age, Time Past" (1955), and while he goes so far as to call Parker a possible model for the novel's narrator, he agrees with Anderson's characterization of Ellison's views on Parker. For Spaulding, as for Anderson, the narrator's (and the artist's) task is, paradoxically, to find his or her individual voice through engagement with and submission to an artistic tradition—competing impulses that Anderson calls centrifugal and centripetal. Like Anderson, Spaulding argues that Ellison sees Parker and the early bebop pioneers as too dismissive of jazz tradition, in that they are unable to distinguish that tradition's value from the ugly stereotypes (related to primitivism and minstrelsy) that accompany it. Spaulding suggests that in the novel's narrative, the narrator, too, fails to find value in his own African American traditions—a failure that is especially clear in the narrator's discomfort with Trueblood and, arriving in New York, the blues singer Pete Wheatstraw (489). But Spaulding also notes that, in composing his narrative, the narrator lets Trueblood and Wheatstraw speak for themselves, thus incorporating their discourses into his own. Within his narrative, in other words, the narrator is as flawed and limited as the early bebop musicians, but in telling his tale he transcends them.

Anderson, Spaulding, and Raussert's analyses are particularly useful for the similarities they draw out in seemingly divergent readings of jazz's function in *Invisible Man*. All three describe jazz, in Ellison's estimation, in terms that recall our previous discussions of the baroque. Raussert, for example, highlights jazz's nature as an artifact

of cultural hybridization, and a product of the encounter of African slaves brought into the Americas. And for all three of these critics, Ellison uses jazz as a means of exploring a complicated view of history (and, relatedly, of canon formation) that incorporates both continuity and rupture. Jazz, Raussert writes, "is characterized by a fusion of temporal continuity and discontinuity" (519).

Spaulding's article offers another return to our earlier discussions. The title of his article, "Embracing Chaos in Narrative Form: The Bebop Aesthetic in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*" indicates what he sees as perhaps the most important function of jazz in Ellison's novel. That is, Spaulding argues that jazz allows Ellison to maintain, within the ordered form of his novel, moments of chaos, which he sometimes calls dissonance. "Although what results is a highly ordered and composed literary work," Spaulding writes, "there are key narrative moments in which Ellison, through the narrator, infuses the text with stylistic and improvisational chaos or dissonance" (491). In this latter assertion Spaulding and Anderson seem to differ fundamentally: Anderson sees Ellison using jazz to bring order to chaos, while Spaulding sees the opposite. But, just as their disagreement over Ellison's valuation of bebop proved to be superficial in terms of its implications for their readings of the novel, their discrepant views of novel's chaotic (or formal) nature turns out to be superficial, as well. According to Spaulding, *Invisible Man*'s bebop aesthetic is "distorted and dissonant on the surface *but coherent and melodic on a deeper level*" (493, my emphasis). And, later, Spaulding writes that the success of the narrator depends on his "ability to retain the *seemingly* chaotic dissonance within the form of his narration" (496, my emphasis). The image that conversation evokes is the one with which we began this study: the impossible harmonies of the New

World's baroque forms, first exemplified (according to Carpentier) by the strange musical happening organized to celebrate Salvador Golomón's victory in Bayamo over Gilbert Girón. Our reading of Carpentier, then, can help us take Spaulding's analysis of Ellison a step further, to show how those "impossible harmonies," those surface dissonances (and surface harmonies) reflect the role that Ellison sees for race in the US.

If, following these critics, we assume that jazz is a fundamental metaphor in *Invisible Man*, we also have to acknowledge two peculiar characteristics of Ellison's writing on music. The first is the unique geography to which the author attributes jazz's development. That is, where jazz is typically seen as a Southern phenomenon that migrated to New York, where it coalesced and blossomed in Harlem, Ellison gives primacy of place to sites typically considered peripheral to jazz history, especially his hometown of Oklahoma City. Even when writing about the New York City music scene, Ellison primarily discusses childhood friends and acquaintances, such as Lester Young and Charlie Christian, and veterans of the nearby Kansas and Missouri jazz circuits, such as Parker, Ben Webster, and Coleman Hawkins. As a result, New York City becomes an extension of Ellison's early experiences with the music, a colony for Ellison of jazz's periphery. The second notable characteristic is Ellison's repeated insistence that struggle, conflict, and war form the essence of jazz.

3.1.3 Booby Traps in Those Folk Tunes: Ralph Ellison's Jazz Struggle

In "Beating That Boy" (1945), Ellison provides another image that resonates with Carpentier's notion of "impossible harmonies": he says a black person who laughs when

recounting a conversation about race with a white person is "like a booby trap in a music box full of folk tunes" (145). The simile is particularly apt for characterizing Ellison's idea of the role black expression plays in US culture, and reflects the recurring emphasis on struggle, conflict, and war in his writings on jazz.

Ellison regularly refers to national identity in terms of a struggle that takes two main forms: the first is an external struggle in which, for example, North American society expands by fighting against outside actors and forces; the second is an internal struggle, in which minority subjects—participating with the larger North American society in its external struggle—fight the culture itself for recognition, for freedom and equality. In this second struggle, the first struggle becomes a tool or a weapon—but this in no way mitigates the fervor of the second struggle. Nor does the internal struggle mitigate the problematic nature of the black subject's commitment to the external struggle. That is, Ellison recognizes that the external struggle is itself an outgrowth of the oppression against which the minority subjects fight in their (internal) struggle against society. Black subjects, then, find themselves in a position similar to the one in which James Weldon Johnson found himself, as a "race leader" and representative of the United States government, in the first decades of the 20th Century. As Amanda M. Page notes, Johnson's response to this ambiguous situation was, itself, both ambiguous and contradictory: as US Consul in Corinto, Nicaragua, Johnson effectively used US power to suppress a popular uprising against the US-supported government, thus protecting North American interests against the demands of imperial subjects; years later, as editor of the *New York Age*, he took an anti-imperialist position, vehemently and repeatedly condemning the US occupation of Haiti.

In his Introduction to the 1981 edition of *Invisible Man,* Ellison describes the book as a novel born of World War II: *Invisible Man* "had been conceived as a war novel," he says, begun "during the summer of 1945, in a barn in Waitsfield, Vermont, where I was on leave from service in the merchant marine" (ix). Originally, Ellison says, he had been planning to write a story about a black officer in a Nazi prisoner-of-war camp (xii), but the insistent voice of his "invisible" narrator caused him to write an entirely different plot.[105] Ellison's introduction suggests that, though the subject matter ostensibly changed, the novel remained a war novel, reflecting the truth that Ellison saw both in the treatment of black soldiers in the war and in the more general African American experience of US history: that is, the irony that "in order for the Negro to fulfill his duty as a citizen it was often necessary that he fight for his self-affirmed right to fight" (xiii).[106]

Ellison thus breaks from the popular depiction of World War II as a "good war," and, further, connects it to more morally suspect conflicts in US history. "[H]istorically," he writes, "most of this nation's conflicts of arms have been—at least for Afro-Americans—wars-within-wars" (xiii). Rather than a noble struggle of good-against-evil, war becomes a morally complicated engagement in which the soldier implicates himself in oppression. The black protagonist of Ellison's originally conceived story, for example,

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[105] Characteristically, Ellison describes the insistence of his narrator's voice in musical terms, "a honky-tonk trumpet blasting through a performance say, of Britten's *War Requiem*" (xv). It is also worth noting that Ellison plays with the paradox of the black soldier as second-class citizen in "Flying Home" (1944), one of the few pieces of fiction he published before *Invisible Man*.

[106] Stanley Sander (1992) writes about the ambivalence military service evoked among African Americans during World War II. And long before that, James Weldon Johnson chronicled in a series of editorials for *New York Age* (1917-1919) both the absurdity of discrimination towards soldiers of color, and its continued persistence both in the armed forces and in society at large.

was keenly aware that "once the peace was signed, the German camp commander could immigrate to the United States and immediately take advantage of freedoms that were denied the most heroic of Negro servicemen" (xiii).

As we will see below, this is a significant shift. And from this complicated vision of society a number of motifs emerge in *Invisible Man*: the theme of treason, for example, is broached in the first pages of Chapter 1, when the narrator's dying grandfather says, "I never told you, but our life is a war and I have been a traitor all my born days, a spy in the enemy's country ever since I give up my gun back in the Reconstruction" (13), Similarly, the battle royal in which the narrator is forced to fight (also in Chapter 1) by the white elite of his hometown becomes a paradigm that reappears throughout the novel's plot.

Unsurprisingly, Ellison turned to music to express this sociological vision, and "antagonistic cooperation" is the primary way Ellison describes jazz. Ellison called the "cruel contradiction" inherent in jazz the fact that "true jazz is an art of individual assertion within and against the group" and "a contest in which each artist challenges all the rest" ("Charlie Christian" 267). Ellison shared this attitude, incidentally, with Charles Mingus. Adam Schatz writes of Mingus, "No matter how small the ensemble, he could create a sense of passionate, often combative dialogue: as one of his sidemen put it, Mingus 'liked the sound of a struggle'" (Schatz). In "Going to the Territory," Ellison takes this musical conflict as emblematic of the American condition, which he describes as "a constant state of debate and contention" and "a battle-royal conflict of interests," a "warfare of words and symbolic actions by which we seek to advance our private interests while resolving our political differences" (599). Making the metaphor explicitly

musical, Ellison takes as an example of this type of progressive struggle a discussion of his novel that he witnessed in a Brown University classroom: "[I]t was as though a group of sophisticated minds were functioning like a group of jazz musicians and were working in a spirit of antagonistic cooperation to explore the novel's hidden possibilities" (602-3).

It's no surprise, then, that Chapter 1's "Battle Royal" scene, which occurs immediately after the narrator relates his grandfather's elaboration of an ethic of treason, takes place in a venue that evokes a smoky jazz nightclub. The narrator is brought to a "smoker" where the city's elite white men have gathered in the main ballroom of the city's best hotel. Ellison describes the scene thus: "It was a large room with a high ceiling. Chairs were arranged in neat rows around three sides of a portable boxing ring. The fourth side was clear, revealing a gleaming space of polished floor." Rather than a boxing match, the scene seems set for a performance. Forced to look at a blonde stripper, the narrator hears a clarinet playing as the woman begins to dance. Characters in the scene are repeatedly described as dancing—whether moved by the music, the melee, or the electrified rug the boys onto which the boys are tricked into diving after what prove to be counterfeit coins. The narrator describes a semi-obscured scene in which "streaks of blue light filled the black world behind the blindfold." The blue and the black connect the scene to the song that inspires the narrator's reverie in the novel's prologue, Louis Armstrong's "(What did I do to be so) Black and Blue." At one point during the fight, the narrator learns he can see through his shifting blindfold; what he describes sounds like a scene from a jazz narrative: "I could see the black, sweat-washed forms weaving in the smoky-blue atmosphere like drunken dancers weaving to the rapid drum-like thuds of blows," Ellison writes, and, "the room spun round me, a swirl of lights, smoke, sweating

bodies surrounded by tense white faces" (19).[107] The passage evokes, for example, Ellison's descriptions in "The Golden Age, Time Past" of the New York nightspot Minton's Playhouse: "…the dim rosy lights of the bar in the smoke-veiled room… the mysterious spell created by the talk, the laughter, grease paint, powder, perfume, sweat, alcohol and food—all blended and simmering, like a stew on the restaurant range, and brought to a sustained moment of elusive meaning by the timbres and accents of musical instruments locked in passionate recitative" (237).

Ellison's phrase "locked in passionate recitative" gestures again towards the mix of conflict and cooperation that he sees as characterizing jazz: "locked in" is a phrase that could be followed by "combat" or by "a passionate embrace." And, in "The Golden Age, Time Past," Ellison again describes jazz in terms that suggest struggle, battle and war. Thus Lester Young plays "with and against" Lem Johnson and Ben Webster (243), and Ellison describes the "cutting sessions" in which one musician could "vanquish" another by besting him in improvisatory skills or endurance (245). He compares the jazzmen at Minton's to "disgruntled conspirators meeting fatefully to assemble the random parts of a bomb" (242) and to the "fast guns of the Old West" (246); he plays on the terms "hot" and "cold," which describe not only competing visions of jazz, but, as in the term "the Cold War," also different types of international struggle (241).[108] Nor is this sense of conflict limited to the dynamics within the jazz groups on stage at Minton's: Ellison extends it to the relationship between the jazz groups and their audiences. Thus Ellison

[107] On a similar note, the narrator later watches a boy on the electrified rug "literally dance upon his back, his elbows beating a frenzied tattoo upon the floor" (22).

[108] Ellison also quotes Minton's former bartender, Herman Pritchard, who said, "Lester Young and Ben Webster used to tie up in battle like dogs in the road. They'd fight on those saxophones until they were tired out; then they'd put in long-distance calls to their mothers, both of whom lived in Kansas City, and tell them about it" (246-7).

chides the emerging bebop musicians for rejecting their audience while praising Minton's as a place where the audience was comprised almost entirely of musicians, and non-musicians were crowded out. In these careful modulations Ellison articulates a vision of the artist who must recognize that it is impossible to "be completely and absolutely free of the obligations of the entertainer," and who does not think "that they could play jazz with dignity only by frowning and treating the audience with aggressive contempt" (248).

3.1.3 Golomón on the Prairie: Ralph Ellison and the Buffalo Soldiers

If the paradigmatic conflict in Ellison's American imaginary is less World War II than the Spanish American War, the model soldier in his vision similarly becomes not the World War II G.I. but the so-called "Buffalo Soldier," the black soldier of the regiments including the 9th and 10th Cavalry and the 24th and 25th Infantry Regiments of the US Army, who fought in the Spanish-American War of 1898 and was stationed in various forts throughout the western United States, where he was tasked with suppressing Native American insurrections. The Buffalo Soldier is a central but eclipsed (invisible?) figure in Ellison's imaginary. We might read a trace of him in *Invisible Man* in the group of veterans the narrator encounters at the bar called The Golden Day in Chapter 3. Coming upon the group, who are also mental patients in a convalescence home, the narrator recalls that they will let him pass if he uses the name of their former commanding officer: John Pershing. Pershing led the US Army's African American regiments from the late

1880s on, including during their engagements in the Spanish-American war.[109] The Buffalo Soldier certainly appears in Ellison's reminiscences about his childhood, as when in 1961 he told Richard G. Stern that, growing up in Oklahoma, jazz "got into military drill." He elaborates: "There were many Negro veterans from the Spanish-American War who delighted in teaching the younger boys complicated drill patterns" and "as we mastered the patterns, the jazz feeling would come into it and no one was satisfied until we were swinging" ("That Same Pain" 69).

In "Going to the Territory," Ellison writes:

> But freedom was also to be found in the West of the old Indian Territory. Bessie Smith gave voice to this knowledge when she sang of 'Goin' to the Nation, Going to the Terr'tor',' and it is no accident that much of the symbolism of our folklore is rooted in the imagery of geography. The slaves had learned through the repetition of group experience that freedom was to be attained through geographical movement, and that freedom required one to risk his life against the unknown. (605)

Though here, too, the Buffalo Soldier remains unnamed, his figure stands behind the passage as, for African Americans, the freedom that was "attained through geographical movement" and that "required one to risk his life against the unknown" often entailed military service. Indeed, the 1889 Oklahoma land rush that provided the model for Ellison's vision of geographical movement was made possible by the Buffalo Soldiers' defense of the expanding Western frontier.

[109] Then again, the men could be veterans of World War I, in which Pershing was the commander-in-chief of the US forces.

The echo of the Buffalo Soldier throughout Ellison's writing is not accidental: Ellison's father, Lewis, who died when Ralph was three years old, served in the 25th Infantry, fighting in the Philippines before being discharged (Rampersad 9-10). Ellison claimed his father fought in the Spanish-American War and, in his 1981 introduction to *Invisible Man*, mentioned "having had a father who fought on San Juan Hill, in the Philippines and in China" (xiii). This claim appears to be false—Lewis Ellison seems to have been stateside when the regiment was in Cuba—but Lewis' charge up San Juan Hill appears to be a piece of family lore rather than an outright fabrication on the part of his son (Rampersad 9).[110]

The figure of the Buffalo Soldier holds special significance, too, in the history of American music. Leonardo Acosta lists "the Spanish-American War, in which battalions of US African American soldiers participated, some of whom remained on the island" and "the American intervention, which lasted from 1898 to 1902" as events that had a strong influence on North American jazz (*Cubano Be, Cubano Bop* 2). John Storm Roberts agrees, similarly citing the black regiments that fought in Cuba and "presumably gained some firsthand experience of Cuban music" (*The Latin Tinge* 32). Ned Sublette is more specific, writing that members of the Onward Brass Band from New Orleans spent at least six (and perhaps nine) months in Cuba after volunteering in the 9th Cavalry Regiment. And while Sublette acknowledges that "it is impossible to say whether their stay in Cuba affected the course of New Orleans music," he concludes: "But if a band of

[110] Whether or not Lewis Ellison fought in Cuba is a point of some contention among Ralph Ellison scholars. In *Shadowing Ralph Ellison*, John Wright (2006) contends that the elder Ellison was, in fact, at San Juan Hill (7). But Lawrence Patrick Jackson (2002) insists that the elder Ellison "waited out the Spanish American War in boot camp at Chickamauga Park, Georgia" (6).

the best horn players could stay in Cuba for nine months without absorbing something, at a time when *orquestas típicas* were all the rage in Cuba, they would be unlike any other musicians this writer has ever known" (*Cuba and its Music* 324).

None of this applies solely to the Buffalo Soldier in US (or world) history, of course. Brent Hayes Edwards, for example, writes that "During World War I, about 370,000 African Americans served in the segregated American Expeditionary Force in France, in both service and combat units," and those soldiers served alongside an even greater number of soldiers (many of them black) conscripted from the French colonies. Edwards continues:

> After the war, tales of encounter and connection, forged in the trenches and on the docks, traveled back to the United States with the American fighting forces. Some US blacks stayed in France to study or to perform, most of them gravitating to Paris—for Paris had simultaneously come to appreciate jazz and *l'art negre*, partly through the performances of military music units like James Reese Europe's 369th Infantry Regiment "Hellfighters" Band and postwar musicians including Palmer Jones's International Five, Louis Mitchell, Arthur Briggs, Crickett Smith, Eugene Bullard, Ada Smith, and Florence Embry Jones. (3-4)

Ellison recognizes that the paradox of the black soldier (and his connection to music) is a pattern that repeats itself, which is why, at different points in his writing, he references the black soldiers of the Civil War, World War I, and World War II.[111] But Ellison's

[111] One more connection between *Invisible Man* and *Concierto barroco*: this fertile, jazz-mad Paris, an atmosphere created by the movements of black soldiers, is precisely what draws Filomeno away from the Master at the end of Carpentier's novel.

particular geographic and historic interests bring the idea of the Black Atlantic into the US prairie states. Ellison shows, in other words, how the routes of cultural exchange that Paul Gilroy traced among the seas extended, via prairie schooner as it were, into and out of the Great Plains and the Southwestern United States.

3.2 Ralph Ellison's Prairie Baroque

3.2.1 Luis Jiménez: Southwestern Lezama

The image of the Buffalo Soldier thus ties together several of the Ellison's themes: movement, war, music. So apart from the role that Buffalo Soldiers played in his formation—from Lewis Ellison, the author's father, to the veterans who helped train him musically—it is easy to see the figure as a sort of Ellisonian shorthand for African American experience in the United States. In doing so, we might keep in mind the resonances with Carpentier's Salvador Golomón anecdote: like Carpentier, Ellison depicts a culture, most clearly symbolized by its music, founded on the contributions of black soldiers; more than Carpentier, Ellison explores the consequences of those collaborations for his nation's blacks. But, if for Ellison the Buffalo Soldier played a role in American identity formation parallel to the one Carpentier saw for Golomón in Cuba, and Carpentier used the centrality of Golomón in Cuban history to label his own culture baroque, then it is worth at least entertaining the idea that we can use the same word to label Ellison's conception of the culture he was depicting in *Invisible Man*.

In doing so, though, we have to note that Ellison's baroque, like Ellison's jazz, takes a different form than Johnson's, with a different geography. Just as Ellison

frequently refers to the jazz of his childhood as "Southwestern" jazz, his *barroquismo* has to be considered a Southwestern or prairie baroque.[112] That means that, where in Chapter 1 we found a comparison to the racial politics and aesthetics of Johnson's *Autobiography* in the poems of Nicolás Guillén, with Ellison our comparison will come from another direction. Specifically, we will look at the sculpture of Mexican American artist Luis Jiménez (1940 – 2006).

Jiménez, whose sculpture *Vaquero* graces the cover of Monika Kaup's *Neobaroque in the Americas*, works with fiberglass to refigure iconic images of the US West into post-modern forms. In a 1998 profile on Jiménez, Michael Ennis calls his work "a revisionist history of the American West," one that presents "heretical challenge[s] to the accepted canons of Western art" (Ennis). Ennis notes that Jiménez's use of non-traditional materials and his treatment of Hispanic figures re-center the mythology of the American West around its marginalized subjects.

[112] Interestingly, Charles Mingus's father was also a Buffalo Soldier, a member of the 10th Cavalry, and Mingus was born on an army base in Nogales, Arizona.

Figure 1: *Vaquero*, by Luis Jiménez (1980, photographed outside the Smithsonian Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C.)

Of Jiménez's sculptures, Ennis writes, "Adapted with equal enthusiasm from both high and popular art, Jiménez's figures combine the classical lines and rapturous Baroque energy of a Bernini with the pneumatic surrealism of Mexican calendar art—a potent mix derived from his own cultural hybridism." Kaup describes *Vaquero* thus:

> Depicting a pistol-branding Mexican *vaquero* on his bucking horse, this dynamic composition transforms the ordinary into the mythic, The horse's intense, artificial blue coloring, its thick reddish mane that summons the image of flames running down its neck, and the *vaquero*'s gold trousers flapping in the wind turn horse and rider into one supernatural being

> visiting earth, as in a miracle or the apparition of a saint. On the one hand, Jiménez's bright pop sculpture clearly parodies 'pompous equestrian statues of military heroes found in parks all over the Western world' (Mitchell, 'Baroque Populism' 104). On the other hand, it also corrects an ingrained Anglo-American stereotype, which claims that the cowboy was an invention of the American frontier. To the contrary, as Mitchell points out, Jiménez reminds viewers that the American cowboy was a remake of Mexican *vaquero* culture already in place in Mexico's northern provinces prior to their becoming the American West. (294)

As Ennis notes, perhaps a better reference for Jiménez's sculptures than generic equestrian statues of military heroes are the bucking bronco bronzes of Western artist Frederic Remington. Ennis sees Jiménez's "Sodbuster, San Isidro" as a reworking of a humble farmworker into the "same heroic mold as Remington's cowpunchers and cavalrymen." And *Vaquero* makes obvious allusions to Remington's "The Bronco Buster" (1895).

Further, Jiménez's quotation of Remington contributes to the "classical lines and rapturous Baroque energy" that Ennis sees in *Vaquero*. As William Goetzmann notes, Remington's paintings and sculptures were characterized by their energy and movement, and depicted "a world of melodrama and violence with death all around or else coming right at you" (238-9). Goetzmann describes Remington's painting *Dash for the Timber* thus: "Authentic, yet full of action and color and wonderful melodramatic verve, the line of cowboys and horses hurtling through space as they fled from their Indian pursuers represented an interlocking frieze that in Remington's view, transcended the stilted

classicism of the Parthenon. His desperate riders represented the wild cry of death and danger hurtling straight toward the viewer. The picture was pure theater" (245). Jiménez found those baroque elements in Remington and took advantage of them in his repurposing of Western iconography.

Figure 2: *Bronco Buster* by Frederic Remington (1909)

In some ways, Jimenez's re-centering of the US West around Mexican and Mexican-American culture parallels Johnson's insistence on the centrality of blacks to North American (and Western) civilization, and it is a move that finds parallels in recurring themes in Ellison's work, too. John Rupert Martin outlines seven major characteristics of the historical Baroque: naturalism, a fascination with extreme states of feeling, allegory, a sense of the infinite expressed in a fascination with coextensive space, movement, a play of light and darkness, and a sort of classicism that insists, paradoxically, on "making it new." From Martin we get the sense of the baroque as not only a style that consumes other styles, a style centered on intertextuality, and one that favors play and breaking of the artistic frame, but also as a style that abhors a vacuum, that emphasizes movement, contrast, and extremes, and that enforces cultural hybridity. Martin's baroque expands eternally, like Glissant's idea of a "baroque in the world." In "Going to the Territory," Ellison presents US history as a sort of illustration of the *horror vacui*, of the American drive into the West as an urge towards infinity. Recalling Sarduy's notes on the Big Bang theory as a model for the Neobaroque, Ellison writes:

> This happens through a process of apparently random synthesis, a process which I see as the unconscious logic of the democratic process. Set in motion over two hundred years ago with the founding of this nation, it is an irrepressible force which draws its power from those fateful promises that were made in Philadelphia, and it moves slowly, but steadily, against and around those forces which would thwart our progress toward the fulfillment of the democratic ideal. (600)

Ellison also cites "our vast geopolitical space" which has been filled up by "the mind-boggling rapidity of our national growth," which he also refers to as the "sheer rush and density of incidents" of our history. Thus, where other US authors emphasize the emptiness of the plain and prairie, Ellison underscores how quickly it gets filled in. The emphasis, in other words, is on movement rather than the original space.

In part, this is a simple re-expression of the principle of Manifest Destiny, but Ellison throws dissonance into the nationalist tune: he rags it, placing blacks at its center. This is a tremendous shift, as pronounced as Lezama's reclamation of the baroque for the purposes of counter-conquest, and with the same thrust. Just as Jiménez finds warrant for his work in the Mexican origins of cowboy culture, Ellison recasts the US imperial drama with black protagonists.

3.2.2 The Baroque Golden Day

And just as Jiménez's work relies on a system of quotations and allusions, repurposing "classical" texts of the US artistic canons for subversive purposes, Ellison creates in *Invisible Man* the playful classicism and intertextuality that Martin sees in the historical Baroque. In his analysis of the Trueblood incident, Baker highlights its polyvocality and its status as a "metastory," which he says is "intertextually implicated in a world that is itself constituted by a repertoire of 'stories'" (176). He compares the piece to *Don Quixote*, citing Babcock-Abraham's assertion that Cervantes' novel "takes the writing and reading of literature as its subject" (912) and he describes the episode as a series of nested frame stories that move outward from Trueblood's autobiographical narrative (and the dream narrative within it) to the fictive autobiography of the narrator and, from there,

to the novel itself. Further, Baker argues that these stories themselves are embedded (and engage with) a world of stories that include Christian mythology and the African American folkloric tradition, best expressed by the blues. As we argued in our Introduction, the tendency Baker identifies here could as well be expressed as a part of a jazz matrix. Indeed, González Echevarría supports his assertion that in *Concierto barroco* jazz is "'the impossible harmony,' the baroque concert" (269) by pointing to precisely the characteristics that Baker highlights in Trueblood. "[*Concierto barroco*] is a composite of stories told again," González Echevarría writes, "not in their original version; the original is forgotten, deformed, by means of a new amalgam" (267).

Baker's point about the polyvocality inherent in Trueblood's multiple narrative frames could be made about *Invisible Man* as a whole; it comprises a series of stories (often "told" by different characters) within the narrator's account (itself framed by a "Prologue" and an "Epilogue") which, in turn, must be read as a novel. But his second point, that the Trueblood incident recognizes its own imbrication in a world of stories, reflects a tendency that is especially pronounced in the episode that follows Trueblood, the novel's Golden Day section. In that episode, the metaliterary novel becomes increasingly meta*critical*—that is, it becomes increasingly concerned not just with connecting with the world of stories but with commenting on them. Indeed, Alan Nadel (1988) argues that the Golden Day episode is an extended response to traditional notions of the US canon, like those espoused in Lewis Mumford's influential study *The Golden Day* (1926). In the following pages we will examine Nadel's argument and extend it, arguing that the chapter can be read as a commentary—often playful, sometimes biting—on the Western literary canon as a whole.

In the third chapter of *Invisible Man*, the unnamed narrator drives a white benefactor of his black college away from the encounter with Trueblood, a black sharecropper who has scandalized the region by impregnating his daughter. The benefactor, Mr. Norton, is disturbed by Trueblood's tale to the point of fainting, and asks the narrator to get him a drink. The narrator drives Norton to the only place on the way back to campus, a brothel and bar called the Golden Day, which is a favorite of both the college's students and the local townsmen; on this day, it is overrun by a group of veterans—patients on leave from the nearby asylum. Though the narrator hopes to run in and bring a drink out to the car, the bartender refuses to sell him a drink to take outside, and the narrator is forced to bring Norton into the bar, where the two witness a riot in which the veterans overpower and brutalize their attendant before they are whisked safely into a prostitute's room upstairs, where a patient—a former doctor—treats Norton and (to Norton's chagrin) speaks frankly about North American racial reality. "To some," he tells Norton, "you are the great white father, to others the lyncher of souls, but for all, you are confusion come even into the Golden Day" (72).

Perhaps the foremost literary model for the episode is Edgar Allen Poe's short story "The System of Dr. Tarr and Professor Fether" (1845). That story is a first-person narrative in which a traveler to "the extreme southern provinces of France" visits a *maison de santé* in order to observe its famously tolerant system of operation, in which patients are indulged in their delusions and allowed to wander freely around the grounds. The narrator is quickly informed by his host that the system has been discontinued in favor of a much more restrictive one. Over the course of a progressively chaotic dinner party, the reader, much before the narrator, comes to realize that the dinner's participants

are in fact the former patients, who have taken advantage of loose system, rebelled against the asylum's staff, and are now imprisoning the staff via oppressive methods that include tarring and feathering. The reversal is revealed as the dinner-party guests, ostensibly describing the quirks of the asylum's patients, begin enacting those quirks.

Invisible Man's Golden Day episode immediately echoes Poe's story, as the narrator, coming upon the veterans on the way to the bar, indulges their leader's belief that he is still in the army:

> 'Who the hell do you think you are, running down the army? Give me the countersign. Who's in command of this outfit? You trucking bastards was always too big for your britches. Countersign me!'
>
> 'This is General Pershing's car, sir,' I said, remembering hearing that he responded to the name of his wartime Commander-in-Chief. Suddenly the wild look changed in his eyes and he stepped back and saluted with stiff precision. Then looking suspiciously into the back seat, he barked,
>
> 'Where's the General?'
>
> 'There,' I said, turning and seeing Mr. Norton raising himself, weak and white-faced, from the seat. (55-6)

Poe's story echoes more generally in the veterans' generous treatment, as they are allowed to roam the local whorehouse, and then left alone downstairs while their attendant, Supercargo, avails himself of the bar's upstairs services. And it resonates in the veterans' violent overthrow of Supercargo, who is dragged nearly naked down the staircase and beaten by men who pour beer on him.

Characters from Ellison's episode evoke Poe's story, too. An especially strong parallel can be seen between Poe's narrator and Mr. Norton. In "The System of Dr. Tarr and Professor Fether," the narrator is taken in by the manners of Monsieur Maillard, a former superintendent of the madhouse who, going crazy himself, was imprisoned within it before leading the patients' revolt. Similarly, Ellison's narrator and Norton are rescued by a former doctor, who treats Norton and then, speaking openly to the white man, lapses into a rage. "Hurry, the man is as insane as the rest," Norton says, fleeing.

Like Poe's story, Ellison's Golden Day episode features men making "hostile speeches at the top of their voices" and men who "whirled about like maniacs" (65).[113] In the story, Poe's narrator escapes most of the scene's violence by rolling under a sofa and lying still; Ellison's narrator finds Mr. Norton, sprawled "like an aged doll" under the stairs. But more than in these details, the Golden Day episode evokes Poe's story in its nightmarish tone, propelled, like Poe's story, by feverish associations and unstable understandings. What's more, both scenes are set to strange, improvisatory musical accompaniment. Ellison must have delighted in the descriptions of jazz-like music in Poe's story:

[113] One of the lunatics of Poe's story, in addition to thinking he has two heads, believes that he has "an extraordinary gift for oratory," which he "could not refrain from display" (288). Another believes he is a human tee-totum. With both his references to the hostile speeches and the whirling maniacs, then, Ellison seems to be directly referencing the pandemonium of the broken-up dinner party in "Dr. Tarr and Professor Fether." Poe writes: "Meantime, upon the main dining-table, among the bottles and glasses, leaped the gentleman who, with such difficulty, had been restrained from leaping there before. As soon as he fairly settled himself, he commenced an oration, which, no doubt, was a very capital one, if it could only have been heard. At the same moment, the man with the tee-totum predilection, set himself to spinning around the apartment, with immense energy, and with arms outstretched at right angles to his body; so that he had all the air of a tee-totum in fact, and knocked everybody down that happened to get in his way" (293).

> We drank. The company followed our example without stint. They chatted—they jested—they laughed—they perpetrated a thousand absurdities—the fiddles shrieked—the drum row-de-dowed—the trombones bellowed like so many brazen bulls of Phalaris—and the whole scene, growing gradually worse and worse, as the wines gained ascendancy, became at length a sort of pandemonium in petto. (291)

Later, Poe describes the scene when the asylum's attendants have broken free from their confinement and are invading the dinner party in an attempt to restore order:

> A scene of the most terrible confusion ensued. Monsieur Maillard, to my excessive astonishment threw himself under the side-board. I had expected more resolution at his hands. The members of the orchestra, who, for the last fifteen minutes, had been seemingly too much intoxicated to do duty, now sprang all at once to their feet and to their instruments, and, scrambling upon their table, broke out, with one accord, into "Yankee Doodle," which they performed, if not exactly in tune, at least with an energy superhuman, during the whole of the uproar. (293)

Ellison describes his scene in similar terms:

> With Supercargo lying helpless on the bar, the men whirled about like maniacs. The excitement seemed to have tilted some of the more delicately balanced ones too far. Some made hostile speeches at the top of their voices against the hospital, the state and the universe. The one who called himself a composer was banging away the one wild piece he seemed to know on the out-of-tune piano, striking the keyboard with fists

> and elbows and filling in other effects in a bass voice that moaned like a bear in agony. One of the most educated ones touched my arm. He was a former chemist who was never seen without his shining Phi Beta Kappa key. (65)

Poe's descriptions of jazz-like music, and his depiction of the tarred-and-feathered attendants as "a perfect army of what I took to be Chimpanzees, Ourang-Outangs, or big black baboons of the Cape of Good Hope," would certainly have caught Ellison's eye. Making note of these racialized descriptions, and Poe's pointed insistence that the story takes place in the *south* of France, Samuel Otter (2010) suggests that "The System of Dr. Tarr and Professor Fether" enacts a racial allegory. But Otter does not know what, exactly, that allegory signifies. He asks:

> Are the asylum inmates who pretend to be free, have imprisoned their keepers, and can barely restrain themselves from enacting the reductio ad absurdum of their delusions meant to represent European American lower classes or African Americans under southern slavery or in northern freedom? Are the misguided officials, who instituted a 'system of soothing' that banned punishment and granted the inmates 'much apparent liberty' meant to be northern social reformers or southern liberals? Or since they have been tarred and feathered and are at first taken by the narrator for monkeys or apes when they escape from their cells, are they blackened as well? (171)

He concludes, "Beyond the fact that inmates and keepers have switched roles, it is not clear, in terms of politics, region, or race, what it would mean to get the story, or even

what *it* is" (171). Poe's story reflects a Hegelian impulse towards struggle that List (1982) finds characteristic of Ellison's writing, an impulse in which, as List writes, "the oppressed, then, can put on the hat of the oppressor; the gentle individual can suddenly emerge as a tyrant" (12). But the story's inscrutability, too, seems likely to have drawn Ellison to the work, as it resonates through the Golden Day scene as well.

Alan Nadel sees the Golden Day episode as a revision of Melville's *Benito Cereno* (1855), a novella that provides one of the Ellison's epigraphs to *Invisible Man*.[114] In *Benito Cereno*, a seaman is brought aboard a slaving vessel in which, unbeknownst to him, a mutiny has taken place. The slaves are now in charge of the ship, and the former captain is forced to enact a charade in order to deceive his visitor. Like the narrator of "The System of Dr. Tarr and Professor Fether," (and like both Ellison's Mr. Norton and his narrator) the visitor is slow to ascertain the truth of the situation; and like Ellison's Mr. Norton, he finds himself at the mercy of the black men around him.

Nadel calls the Golden Day chapter an "extended allusion" to *Benito Cereno*, noting similarities in character (like Norton, Cereno is weak, ill and prone to fainting), plot (like Norton, Cereno is nursed and revived by black caretakers), and even in certain symbolic gestures. Nadel points out, for example, that a key moment in *Benito Cereno* comes when the main conspirator shaves Cereno while the visitor, Delano, watches; Ellison includes in his Golden Day scene a moment when one of the black vets, standing over Norton's unconscious body, "took Mr. Norton's head between his hands, tilting it at arm's length and then, pinching the chin gently like a barber about to apply a razor, gave a sharp, swift movement" (*IM* 60-1). Nadel observes, too, that the overseer's name in the

[114] *Benito Cereno*, in turn, has been linked to "The System of Dr. Tarr and Professor Fether." See Otter, 2010 (172).

Golden Day episode, Supercargo, is the title for a financial overseer on ship (105). And he notes that Ellison's use in the preface of Delano's final question to Cereno ("You are saved: what has cast such a shadow upon you?") without its answer ("The Negro") makes the text of the book, in effect, the answer to that question. *Benito Cereno*, then, serves as one of the many narrative frames of the novel.[115]

A third set of literary references in the scene comes from the Circe episode of *Ulysses*, in which Bloom and Stephen travel to Nighttown, Dublin's red-light district. The "Golden Day," in fact, might be read as a playful reversal of "Nighttown," an illumination of the activities that society tries to keep in the dark. As with "The System of Dr. Tarr and Professor Fether," Ellison seems, at times, to reference his source directly. An apocalyptic theme, for example, runs through Circe, as when Florry announces to Bloom, "They say the end of the world is coming this summer" (623) and, a page later, a stage direction announces "THE END OF THE WORLD*"* (624). In the Golden Day, a veteran grabs the narrator and tells him, apropos of nothing, "It will occur at 5:30." When the narrator asks what will occur at 5:30, the veteran replies, "The great, all-embracing absolute Armistice, the end of the World!" (57).[116] Just as Circe represents a parade of shifting and morphing characters, the Golden Day presents a panoply of voices and discourses. Often these discourses overlap with those from Circe, as when two of Ellison's characters describe Jack Johnson's boxing match with James Jeffries in medical

[115] Nadel could have noted still more allusions in *Invisible Man* to *Benito Cereno*, such as the fact that Delano calls himself "Jack of the Beach" (184), a nickname that echoes into the invisible man's words in the Prologue: "Call me Jack-the-Bear…" Of course, the line also echoes *Moby Dick*'s opening sentence.

[116] Nadel sees this as still another reference to Mumford's Golden Day era. Specifically, he reads the veteran's apocalyptic vision as a send-up of millennialist cults like the Millerites who, in Nadel's words, contributed to the "unjustifiably positive" outlook of the period by encouraging the belief "that an ideal society was possible" (90-2).

vocabulary that recalls the language of the medical students who accompany Stephen Dedalus into Nighttown:

> …and Johnson hit Jeffries at an angle of 45 degrees from his lower left lateral incisor, producing an instantaneous blocking of the left thalamic rine, frosting it over like the freezing unit of a refrigerator, thus shattering his autonomous nervous system and rocking the big brick-laying creampuff with extreme hyperspasmic muscular tremors which dropped him dead on the extreme tip of his coccyx which, in turn, produced a sharp traumatic reaction in his sphincter nerve and muscle, and then, my dear colleague, they swept him up, sprinkled him with quicklime and rolled him away in a barrow. Naturally, there was no other therapy possible. (58)

In general, the Golden Day shares with Circe and with "The System of Dr. Tarr and Professor Fether" a nightmarish, dissociating quality, a playful changefulness that occasionally tips into eeriness, and an overall sense of instability and topsy-turvy understanding. And, just as Ellison would have noticed Poe's almost prescient, jazz-like descriptions of the music at his *maison de santé*'s dinner party, it would not have escaped him that Circe happens to be one of the episodes in *Ulysses* that most frequently references America and, in particular, African Americans. The episode contains multiple references to slavery and slave-auctions; a moment that parodies blackface minstrelsy, and bits of African American slang. The chapter references America more generally, too, in mentions of bowie knives, "Kentucky cocktails," Sitting Bull, and the stories of Washington Irving.

A final connection can be made between the section, and those surrounding it, and the writings of James Weldon Johnson. Baker has written that Johnson's *Autobiography* is a forgotten prototype for *Invisible Man*, and the former echoes through the latter's tone and its musicality; *Invisible Man*'s narrator even seems to play, in his "Epilogue," on the insistence by the *The Autobiography*'s narrator that his story is a practical joke on society: "Thus one of the greatest jokes in the world is the spectacle of the whites busy escaping blackness and becoming blacker every day, and the blacks striving toward whiteness, becoming quite dull and gray" (*IM* 436).

The overlaps between *Invisible Man*'s plot and Ellison's autobiography are well documented: the narrator's college, for example, is said to be modeled after the Tuskegee Institute and, like his narrator, Ellison left his college for New York City without graduating. But unlike his narrator Ellison was not expelled from his school—in that respect, the novel more closely echoes an event Johnson relates in *Along This Way*. Johnson writes that at Atlanta University he was friendly with a group of students (including his childhood friend, called D— in the text) known as the Big Four.[117] One day, while Johnson was at baseball practice, the group left campus down "a clay road leading into the country" to a place where they could buy alcohol and smoke. The college president, Mr. Francis, interrogates Johnson, who he at first believes to have been part of the wayward group. The four who left campus to drink are suspended indefinitely and, Johnson reports, "None of the four ever went back to Atlanta University" (83). If the college *Invisible Man*'s narrator attends resembles Tuskegee, it also resembles Atlanta

[117] This has to be read as a coincidence, but one too compelling not to note: "Big four" is the name of the rhythm, based on the *habanera*, developed by Buddy Bolden in New Orleans at the turn of the 20th Century. It is, literally, the "Spanish tinge" Jelly Roll Morton referenced in his famous comments on the "seasoning" of jazz.

University as described by Johnson. And the similarities between Johnson's anecdote and *Invisible Man*'s Golden Day incident are of a piece with the repeated connections between the novel and Johnson's writing, including *The Autobiography*.

The Golden Day episode is thus a very meta-literary moment in *Invisible Man*. Nadel reads it as a commentary on the American canon, seeing it specifically as a rebuff of Mumford's seminal work of literary criticism, *The Golden Day*. In that work (explored briefly in Chapter 1), Mumford argues that US culture reached its peak, reflected most of all in its literature, during the period between 1830 and 1860. Of that period, Mumford writes:

> An imaginative New World came to birth during this period, a new hemisphere in the geography of the mind. That world was the climax of American experience. What preceded led up to it: what followed, dwindled away from it; and we who think and write today are either continuing the first exploration, or we are disheartened, and relapse into some stale formula, or console ourselves with empty gestures of frivolity. (ctd in Nadel 87)

Nadel notes that this time period ended with the Civil War, suggesting that what came after Emancipation was worse than what came before. To be clear, Mumford does not suggest that the United States declined *because* of Emancipation; his scapegoat is, rather, the industrialism that destroyed what he saw as the United States' Romantic individualism. But Mumford's line of demarcation is nonetheless unfortunate: "As it turned out," he writes, "the war was a struggle between two forms of servitude, the slave and the machine." The machines won, and Mumford paints that as a tragedy. As Nadel

points out, Mumford's portrayal of an American Golden Age requires him to find societal harmony in an era where it did not exist—which meant minimizing the divisions caused by slavery. Nadel writes, "In a book of well over 50,000 words, aimed at comparing the antebellum American mind to the postbellum, there are not 500 words dealing with slavery and/or blacks" (93). This oversight is precisely where Ellison contests Mumford in *Invisible Man*'s Golden Day. By highlighting *Benito Cereno* and "The System of Dr. Tarr and Professor Fether," Ellison emphasizes how fully the issue of slavery infused the literature of the moment.

But, as our analysis shows, the Golden Day episode plays with more than just the US literary canon—it also riffs on James Joyce and on James Weldon Johnson, who, as an African American writer, was outside of the mainstream US canon at the time Ellison wrote. Thus, the episode deserves to be read as a play on literature more generally, as another iteration of the Joycean sense of play that permeates Circe. As Baker posits, it belongs in the line of *Don Quixote*, in the tradition that, to borrow Sarduy's words, has inherited "the finest examples of this *carnivalization* of literature." It is one of those "texts that establish a dialogue in the work, a theatrical spectacle whose text bearers—the *actuants* the Greimas speak of—are other texts" ("Baroque and Neobaroque" 280).

More than just commenting on or critiquing the canon, though, *Invisible Man*—like *The Autobiography* before it—is a project of both revision and, importantly, integration. In *Concierto barroco*, after being told by Filomeno of Bayamo's musical celebration, El Indiano objects: "Imposible armonía! Nunca se hubiese visto semejante disparate, pues mal pueden amaridarse las viejas y nobles melodías del romance, las sutiles mudanzas y diferencias de los buenos maestros, con la bárbara algarabía que

arman los negros, cuando se hacen de sonajas, marugas y tambores!" The objection pinpoints one of Ellison's continuing concerns, which we will explore in our final section: the reconciliation of European values with African American ones, and of "official" art music with vernacular music.

3.3 *Invisible Man*: Ralph Ellison's New World Symphony

Ellison depicts the reconciliation of European values with African American ones as one of his first artistic concerns. In "Living with Music," he describes the conflict he felt as a young boy learning music in a black community that was, at once, held in thrall to European American notions of value and suffused with the vernacular richness of African American culture. He describes his situation as that of being "caught" between two traditions: "that of Negro folk music, both sacred and profane, slave song and jazz, and that of Western classical music. It was most confusing: the folk tradition demanded that I play what I heard and felt around me, while those who were seeking to teach the classical tradition in the schools insisted that I play strictly according to the book and express that which I was *supposed* to feel. This sometimes led to clashes of wills" (230).

It also sometimes led to clashes of sound, as Ellison describes his practice sessions as mish-mashes of ill-matched songs and musical drills. "Caught mid-range between my two traditions," he writes, "where one attitude often clashed with the other and one technique of playing was by the other opposed, I caused whole blocks of people to suffer" ("Living with Music" 230). In Ellison's telling, the Oklahoma City of his childhood was simultaneously a hotbed of jazz innovation and a center of bourgeois, integrationist black conservatism. The coexistence of the two cultural impulses caused

anxiety for "those who were seeking to teach the classical tradition;" even Ellison's favorite childhood musical teacher, Mrs. Breaux, discouraged her students from playing jazz ("Going to the Territory" 610).[118]

This theme, the conflict of African American musical values with European-derived ones, appears throughout Ellison's nonfiction. In his reminiscence of Jimmy Rushing, Ellison writes:

> Jazz and the blues did not fit into the scheme of things as spelled out by our two main institutions, the church and the school, but they gave expression to attitudes which found no place in these and helped to give our lives some semblance of wholeness. Jazz and the public dance was a third institution in our lives, and a vital one, and though Jimmy was far from being a preacher, he was, as official floor manager or master-of-the-dance at Slaughter's Hall, the leader of a public rite ("Remembering Jimmy" 275).

And Ellison generalizes the conflict from his own childhood to black musicians as a group: in "The Charlie Christian Story," he emphasizes the diversity of Christian's training, pointing out that in the school Christian attended (with Ellison), "harmony was taught from the ninth through the twelfth grades; there was an extensive and compulsory music-appreciation program, and, though Charles [Christian] was never a member, a concert band and orchestra and several vocal organizations" ("Charlie Christian Story"

[118] Despite her attempts to keep her students from playing jazz, Ellison says that Breaux recognized and celebrated the value of African American folk traditions. As one of the owners of a segregated theater that regularly featured jazz orchestras and performances of spirituals, Ellison writes that Breaux "provided a nexus in which the vernacular art forms could be encountered along with the classical" ("Going to the Territory" 610).

268). Similarly, he points out, with an exclamation point, that Count Basie was "conservatory trained!" ("Alain Locke" 448).

In fact, much of Ellison's writing—both fiction and nonfiction—can be boiled down to an attempt to find a settled place within the inherent tension between these two sets of musical values. More specifically, a good deal of Ellison's work seems to address one possible answer to that tension, Hippolyte Taine's "nation-building narrative" supported Dvořák and others, including Alain Locke. As explored in previous chapters, both Alejo Carpentier and James Weldon Johnson, a friend of Dvořák's student Harry Burleigh, seemed—at times—to number among the proponents of that narrative.

In time, this belief hardened into what Anderson calls the "Tuskegee doxa." In Anderson's words, "The New Negro doxa taught at Tuskegee officially endorsed vernacular 'Negro Idioms'—such as work songs, spirituals, blues, and even jazz—as raw or provincial resources for formal cosmopolitan art" (283). Anderson suggests that Ellison rejected that doxa, writing to Albert Murray that "Bessie Smith singing a good blues may deal with experience as profoundly as Eliot…" Ellison refused to privilege symphonic form over the folk forms that Dvořák suggested ought to serve as its foundations. It is likely that, when Ellison said, "I didn't always agree with him [Locke], and I don't today," ("Alain Locke" 443), this integrationist view of culture makes up a significant basis for that disagreement.

Looking at the totality of Ellison's writing, though, the issue becomes more complicated. Ellison actually offers a fairly hearty defense of the "New Negro doxa" in his tribute to Hazel Harrison, "The Little Man at Chehaw Station" (1977). In that piece, he relates a piece of advice Harrison once gave him. Referring to one of the train stops on

the way to Tuskegee, Harrison said, "You must *always* play your best, even if it's only in the waiting room at Chehaw Station, because in this country there'll always be a little man hidden behind the stove." This little man, Harrison says, will "know the music, and the tradition, and the standards of musicianship required for whatever you set out to perform" (494).

Through the course of the piece, the "little man" comes to stand not only for the United States listening public, but also for the nation's potential for musical greatness, as measured by symphonic, European standards. Ellison plays ironically with the train station's traditional association with African American folk forms: the blues, Baker reminds us, "may thus announce itself by the onomatopoeia of the train's whistle sounded on the indrawn breath of a harmonica" (*Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature* 8), and the piece can also be read as well as an allusion to W.C. Handy's blues origin story. But he also uses the character as an emblem of the melting pot, against the more multicultural ideal of "ethnicity." In one passage Ellison writes, "The proponents of ethnicity—ill concealing an underlying anxiety, and given a bizarre bebopish stridency by the obviously American vernacular inspiration of the costumes and rituals ragged out to dramatize their claims to ethnic (and genetic) insularity—have helped give our streets and campuses a rowdy, All Fool's Day carnival atmosphere. In many ways, then, the call for a new social order based upon the glorification of ancestral blood and ethnic background acts as a call to cultural and aesthetic chaos" (509).

The "little man," then, represents harmony and order against this chaos, and through the piece Ellison seems to accord with Washington's critique of the integrationist nature of Johnson's "mulatto-based, American nationalism." This is the conservative

Ellison, the one derided as an "Uncle Tom" and called out-of-touch with the "new breed" of activist represented by men like Baraka and Larry Neal. But, for a writer who deals so frequently in the carnivalesque and who, as Spaulding points out, seeks to preserve chaos within the order of his novelistic form, the argument strikes a discordant note with much of the author's work. A contrasting argument appears in "Living with Music" (1955). In that essay, Ellison describes the period in which he was writing *Invisible Man* from his apartment in Harlem as a period during which he was assaulted by conflicting musical value systems: he shared one thin wall with a restaurant with a jukebox playing popular tunes, another wall with a swing enthusiast; above his head was a classically trained opera vocalist, and behind his apartment local drunks gathered and sang barbershop songs, country blues, and even Irish folk songs. Ellison describes himself as like the king in Italo Calvino's "A King Listens," in the center of a great chamber of sound, where the nearby apartments "towering above, caught every passing thoroughfare sound and rifled it down to me" (228). Eventually, the exercises of the singer above became too distracting for him to write, and Ellison and his wife bought a complicated Hi-Fi system. Ellison and the singer became locked in a battle of sounds, each trying to drown out the other. This was the moment when Ellison found his creativity, which had been blocked—he tells us before that he was merely "trying" to write (227)—and it seems no surprise that the moment follows the model of antagonistic cooperation that he had ascribed to jazz.

Ellison concludes the piece by observing that "in the United States when traditions are juxtaposed they tend, regardless of what we do to prevent it, irresistibly to merge," and that "while it might sound incongruous at first, the step from the spirituality

of the spirituals to that of Beethoven of the symphonies or Bach of the chorales is not as vast as it seems" (236). But this merging is not the seamless blending one would expect from a melting pot—instead, as the metaphor of his cacophonous Harlem apartment suggests, it's one that depends on the irreducibility and antagonism of diverse elements. Thus, he says, "Living with music today we find Mozart and Ellington, Kristen Flagstad and Chippie Hill, William D. Lawson and Carl Orff all forming part of our regular fare" (236). Ellison moved away, then, from the harmonious nationalism of Dvořák to the more modernist and dissonant national identity expressed in Charles Ives' *Three Places in New England* (1914), the second piece of which ("Putnam's Camp, Redding, Connecticut") is meant to recreate the sensation of listening to two marching bands simultaneously playing different pieces in different keys. The comparison is especially apt considering the Ives' acknowledgement of the role of black soldier in United States' Civil War in the set's first piece, "The 'St.-Gaudens' in Boston Common (Colonel Shaw and his Colored Regiment)." Incidentally, Ellison mentions the monument that inspired Ives in his 1981 introduction to *Invisible Man*:

> Like a sudden recall of an incident from my college days when, opening a vat of Plasticine donated to an invalid sculptor friend by some Northern studio, I found enfolded within the oily mass a frieze of figures modeled after those depicted on Saint-Gauden's monument to Colonel Robert Shaw and his 54th Massachusetts Negro Regiment, a memorial which stands on Boston Common. I had no idea as to why it should surface, but perhaps it was to remind me that since I was writing fiction and seeking vaguely for images of black and white fraternity I would do well to recall that Henry

> James's brother Wilky had fought as an officer with those Negro soldiers, and that Colonel Shaw's body had been thrown into a ditch with those of his men. Perhaps it was also to remind me that war could, with art, be transformed into something deeper and more meaningful than its surface violence… (xvii)

Or perhaps Spaulding is right, and a better musical comparison for Ellison's nationalism might be some version of jazz, particularly the unrealized promise Ellison sees in Bebop in the "The Golden Age, the Time Past." Readings from *Invisible Man* certainly support this argument. In one of the book's early, pivotal scenes, the narrator, having returned the overwhelmed Mr. Norton to campus, awaits a meeting with the college president that he fears (rightly) will result in his expulsion. In the meantime, he attends the school's Founder's Day ceremony in the campus auditorium. The narrator says:

> I did not listen to the next speaker, a tall white man who kept dabbing at his eyes with a handkerchief and repeating his phrases in an emotional and inarticulate manner. Then the orchestra played excerpts from Dvorák's *New World Symphony* and I kept hearing "Swing Low Sweet Chariot" resounding through its dominant theme—my mother's and grandfather's favorite spiritual. It was more than I could stand, and before the next speaker could begin I hurried past the disapproving eyes of teachers and matrons, out into the night. (104)

The passage represents an unmistakable rejection of the "Tuskegee doxa" of cultural integration, a reflection of the narrator's unease at hearing his mother's and grandfather's favorite spiritual reduced to material for a European's symphonic triumph. Just as

interesting, though, is what the narrator encounters on leaving the auditorium: "A mockingbird trilled a note from where it perched upon the hand of the moonlit Founder, flipping its moon-mad tail above the head of the eternally kneeling slave. I went up the shadowy drive, heard it trilling behind me" (104).

As Spaulding notes, Ellison develops the connection between the saxophonist Charlie Parker and the mockingbird throughout his essay "On Bird, Bird-Watching, and Jazz" (1961). In that essay, Ellison looks for clues to the origin of Parker's nickname in Roger Tory Peterson's *Field Guide to the Birds*. He considers Parker's similarity to the goldfinch before deciding:

> The mockingbird, *Mimus polyglottos*, is more promising. Peterson informs us that its song consists of 'long successions of notes and phrases of great variety, with each phrase repeated a half-dozen times before going on to the next,' that mockingbirds are 'excellent mimics' who 'adeptly imitate a score or more species found in the neighborhood,' and that they frequently sing at night—a description which not only comes close to Parker's way with a saxophone but even hints at a trait of his character. For although he *usually* sang at night, his playing was characterized by velocity, by long-continued successions of notes and phrases, by swoops, bleats, echoes, rapidly repeated bebops—I mean rebopped bebops—by mocking mimicry of other jazzmen's styles, and by interpolations of motifs from extraneous melodies, all of which added up to a dazzling display of wit, satire, burlesque and pathos. (257-8)

As clearly as Ellison's narrator rejects the Tuskegee doxa, then, Ellison provides an alternative model in jazz: irreverent, built on not only changefulness and improvisation, but also quotation and interpolation.

For Spaulding, the mockingbird represents chaos, cacophony, *impossible harmonies* that have to be integrated into the narrative of national identity. Spaulding sees this dynamic at work especially in *Invisible Man*'s climactic riot scene, which begins with shootings that the narrator says "sounded like a distant celebration of the Fourth of July" (404). The narrator, nicked by a bullet, falls in with two looters, Scofield and Dupre, and follows them as they take advantage of the chaos to burn down the tenement in which Dupre's son died of tuberculosis.

Ellison claimed he partially based the riot scene on the 1943 Harlem riots, which he witnessed firsthand as a reporter for the *New York Post*. Given the centrality of war in the novel, and the role that the black serviceman plays as the work's unacknowledged center, the appeal of the historical event to Ellison is evident. Though the details of the incident that incited the riot are in dispute, all accounts agree that a white police officer, James Collins, shot and wounded a black serviceman, Robert Bandy, who with his mother was intervening with the officer on behalf of an African American woman named Marjorie Polite.[119] L. Alex Swan attributes the riot, and another one that occurred that summer in Detroit, to the "discrepancy between the promises of American democracy and the realities of Black life," which was "spotlighted by the idealistic goals of World War II" (77). Swan calls racial segregation within the Armed Forces, and second-class

[119] Domenic Capeci (1977) claims that Bandy attacked Collins "for no apparent reason" (100); Swan writes that Bandy saw Collins pushing Polite (87). Ellison understood it as "some altercation between a policeman and a Negro soldier and his mother and wife in a bar" (*Conversations* 80).

citizenship for black soldiers at home, a "major occasion" for the summer's tension. "Here," Swan writes, "was the very essence of the American dilemma—segregated forces engaged in a war for freedom" (78). Swan suggests that the Bandy incident perfectly encapsulated that dilemma for Harlem's blacks.

In typical Ellisonian fashion, the black soldier at the center of the Harlem riot is invisible in the novel's riot scene: when the narrator asks how the riot started, Scofied replies, "Damn if I know, man. A cop shot a woman or something" (408). What the reader does witness in the scene is "outrageous unreality," featuring carnivalesque images of joyful absurdity and community ("I looked at the thin man, feeling a surge of friendship. He didn't know me, his help was disinterested…" 406). The narrator also witnesses threats, in the form of both the police bullets, representing institutional power, and in the competing black nationalism behind Ras the Destroyer's attempt to use the riot to take the armory and start an armed insurrection. Spaulding writes, "Rather than constructing a coherent and harmonious description of that which is, by nature, dissonant, the narrator infuses the 'uncertain extremes of the scale' into his narrative" (496). Along with the mockingbird, Ellison depicts the possibilities for this sort of coherent incoherence in the figure of Dupre, who is first seen wearing an absurd looter's costume of rubber hip boots, several pairs of suspenders, and three hats. Of Dupre, the narrator says, "He was a type of man nothing in my life had taught me to see, to understand, or respect, a man outside the scheme till now" (413).

For Spaulding, the riot represents chaos, a performance of dissonance, after which the narrator goes through a "woodshedding" which allows him to synthesize the chaos he has just witnessed. "The narrator realizes," he writes, "that, rather than harmonizing the

complex and contradictory voices that cause that dissonance, the requisite for re-entry into the world above ground lies in the transformation of that chaos into narrative form." That turns the riot into a musical performance, and it suggests that the synthesis that comes out of it is also, following the metaphor, a musical performance. Spaulding sees this latter performance as a type of bebop still cognizant of the value of tradition ("the narrator's distinctly modern (though steeped in tradition) improvisational voice") (497). After the narrator's period underground, he turns in particular to Louis Armstrong, finding his ambivalence reflected in two contradictory sentiments expressed by the musician:

> Thus, having tried to give pattern to the chaos which lives within the pattern of your certainties, I must come out, I must emerge. And there's still a conflict within me: With Louis Armstrong one half of me says, 'Open the window and let the foul air out,' while the other says, 'It was good green corn before the harvest.' Of course Louie was kidding, *he* wouldn't have thrown old Bad Air out, because it would have broken up the music and the dance, when it was the good music that came from the bell of old Bad Air's horn that counted. Old Bad Air is still around with his music and his dancing and his diversity, and I'll be up and around with mine. (438)

Ellison presents his readers here with the image of jazz as the music of productive contradiction and unresolvable tensions and, paradoxically, as the only way forward in bringing together the diverse elements of American culture. He emphasizes both its carnivalesque nature and its low pedigree: the line "Open the window and let the foul air

out" is from "Buddy Bolden's Blues," and refers to flatulence. And he underscores its intertextuality, as the Armstrong version he references is actually a cover of a song that had, by that time, become a standard.

But there's more: as the song's title suggests, that standard originated with Buddy Bolden, considered one of the first jazz musicians in New Orleans. "Old Bad Air" with his "music and his dancing and his diversity" is not Armstrong, but Bolden, the man who stands behind even *him*. Bolden developed the rhythm known as the "Big Four," which was based on the *habanera* rhythm typical of the Cuban *contradanza*. Ellison uses the song in the final pages of *Invisible Man* to illustrate elements of black experience that, when grouped together, certainly fit under the term *baroque.* In a real sense, "Buddy Bolden's Blues" *is* the Spanish tinge to which Jelly Roll Morton (who also recorded the song) referred in his famous comments. But bearing in mind Ellison's use of the song, it is hard not to look at it also as a *metaphoric* Spanish tinge, one of the many dissonances that Ellison says comes into US expression "from Africa, from Mexico, from Spain, from God knows, everywhere" and makes African American culture such a "flexible instrument" ("Novel as a Function of American Democracy" 766).

Conclusion: On Birds, Bird-Watching, and Jazz

Besides Roberto González Echevarría's notes on the jazz nature of *Concierto barroco* and Lois Parkinson Zamora's assertion that jazz is "arguably the most Baroque" of US music forms, this study follows a series of essays by Barbadian author Kamau Brathwaite on "Jazz and the West Indian Novel" (1967-9). In these essays, Brathwaite examines novels by, among others, Roger Mais (*Brother Man*) and George Lamming (*The Emigrants*). Despite—or, more precisely, because of—these authors' concern with recreating the "West Indian 'creole' experience," Brathwaite finds within them "a form similar to that evolved by the American negro in jazz" (340). Of *Brother Man*, for example, Brathwaite writes:

> Its specific relationship to New Orleans jazz comes with its peculiar sense of union and unity, its contrasting 'duets,' its 'improvisation' and correspondences and above all, its pervading *sense of community* (its *collective* improvisation). The 'Chorus of People' who introduce each section of the book is only the most obvious instance of this sense of community—and a rather external instance at that. Mais' sense of community goes deeper than a mere device. It informs the very structure of the book… (342)

Brathwaite justifies his analysis by writing that "The West Indian writer is just beginning to enter his own cultural New Orleans" (337). Jazz, he explains, is an archetype for the West Indian writer, a working model of "the general movement of New World creative protest." In taking this perspective, Brathwaite grants himself license to see jazz not only

in the music itself, but also in "the new literary elements in the calypso and ska, and of course in the more sophisticated and elaborate structures of West Indian poetry and novels" (339).

Claims like these sometimes produce anxiety about collapsing borders. If we can use jazz to talk about ska, after all, or if we use methodologies developed to talk about African American culture in investigations into Caribbean or Latin American literature, have we not crossed some important boundary? And if not, how do we know where to draw lines between fields and between genres? In the Introduction to *American Creoles*, Martin Munro and Celia Britton connect this anxiety to a fear of the death of academic fields. "There is a curious relationship between the birth of an academic field and its death," they write, explaining that the delineation of a new field of study requires defining that field within limits, while the academic work that follows must test, push, and eventually undo those limits.

The fear brings to mind the one that animates Junot Díaz's science-fiction story "Monstro" (2010). In "Monstro," a strange virus begins infecting poor Haitians, first turning them blacker and then causing bodily growths that Díaz likens to coral reefs "alive and well on the arms and backs and heads of the infected" (107). Later, the virus causes the infected to seek each other out and then grow together. Díaz's narrator explains:

> That was a serious issue. The blast seemed to have a boner for fusion, respected no kind of boundaries. I remember the first time I saw it on the Whorl. Alex was like, Mira esta vaina. Almost delighted. A shaky glypt of a pair of naked trembling Haitian brothers sharing a single strained cot,

> knotted together by horrible mold, their heads slurred into one. About the nastiest thing you ever saw. Mysty saw it and looked away and eventually I did, too. (107)

Finally, after describing an explosion in Haiti that is felt in Havana, San Juan, and Key West, Díaz leaves his readers with the apocalyptic image of "forty-foot-tall cannibal motherfuckers running loose on the Island," verified by a photo snapped by the narrator's friend of "what later came to be known as a Class 2 in the process of putting a slender broken girl in its mouth" (118). Apparently, though this is never stated outright, the giant cannibals have formed from the fused bodies of the infected.

The story resonates with this study in several ways. The Dominican-born, New Jersey-raised Díaz is a writer whose work straddles African American and Latin American cultural expressions, and who situates his writing in those places where boundaries break down. And, like Johnson, Carpentier, and Ellison, he takes advantage of the speculative nature of fiction to resolve unresolvable contradictions and to make the impossible possible. "No entienden que lo fabuloso está en el futuro. Todo futuro es faboloso," the Mexican tells Filomeno in *Concierto barroco* (77), and a similar sentiment stands behind Díaz's fascination with science fiction, expressed in "Monstro" and in his novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007). "Monstro," in particular, could be read with both Baker's blues matrix and New World Baroque theory. The narrator's description of the sickness, "La Negrura," for example, is entirely baroque ("black rotting rugose masses fruiting out of bodies"), while Díaz's characteristic intertexuality and linguistic play recall both Baker and Sarduy. Even the theme of sickness connects with common depictions of African American culture—especially music—as infectious or

contagious on the one hand and, on the other, to Lezama Lima's description of the New World Baroque as a viral phenomenon, a "great creative leprosy" sending out sparks of rebellion (240).[120] And Díaz acknowledges the centrality of music in New World creative protest, too: at one point in the story, the infected population begins to merge sonically as well as physically, emitting bizarre shrieks that become known as "The Chorus," and that Díaz's narrator describes as "the vibrations rising out of the excrescence itself" (109).

Most of all, though, Díaz's story resonates with the blues' and the Baroque's shared tendency to ignore limits, barriers, and borders. We have documented several theorists (Baker, Winks, Lezama, and González Echevarría among them) who locate the genesis of the New World Baroque and/or the blues in the racial confusion of the colonization of the New World. Even if we accept that the two phenomena developed separately from this shared origin, their theorists describe both as totalizing, cannibal discourses, discourses that devour and grow, that spread outward by consuming the discourses they encounter. We might suggest, therefore, that it was always inevitable that they would come together.

In the first sentence of "Monstro," Díaz seems to bring together diverse groups of New World blacks by describing Haitians and dark-skinned Dominicans with a word that was historically used to describe African Americans, and that simultaneously carries Spanish resonances: "At first, Negroes thought it *funny*." But, as Vera Kutzinski points out, *negro* is one of the hardest words to translate in the literature of the African diaspora. She writes, "When one tries to determine just how similar *negro* in, say, early twentieth-

[120] Lezama writes of Aleijadinho: "With this great leprosy, which is also at the proliferating root of his art, he curls and multiplies, stirs and augments the Hispanic with the African" (240).

century Cuban (literary) usage is to racial epithets such as "negro," "Negro," "black," "darky," "boy," or "nigger" as they have circulated in the United States at different times, it quickly becomes apparent that claims to cultural sameness are, in practice, far more complicated than they might appear in theory [see Edwards 35]" ("Fearful Asymmetries" 112). While Díaz's use of the word "negro" unites New World black populations by carrying all of those resonances, it also underscores those differences and the cultural facts that can't be subsumed or digested by any totalizing discourse.

With that in mind, rather than with a forty-foot cannibal, I will conclude this study with a pair of more modest images. Again, after hearing the harmony of Dvořàk's *New World Symphony*, *Invisible Man*'s narrator comes across a mockingbird. Similarly, in creating a new type of New World symphony, Carpentier gives us a character named Filomeno. "Filomeno" is the masculine form of Filomena, which the Real Academia Española tells us is a variation on *filomela*, a name used in the poetic tradition to refer to the *ruiseñor*, or nightingale. Turning to Roger Tory Peterson's *Field Guide to the Birds*, the text Ellison used to peg Charlie Parker as a mockingbird, we see this description of the nightingale:

> Song is rich, loud and musical, each note rapidly repeated several times; most characteristic notes, a deep, bubbling '*chook-chook-chook*' and a slow "*piu-piu-piu*," rising to a brilliant crescendo. Sings day and night, from deep cover, or from low exposed perch. (156)

Both the mockingbird and the nightingale are both known for their song. Both sing at night, and both sing from under cover. Peterson's description of the mockingbird, who uses a "great variety" of notes and phrases and can "adeptly imitate a score or more

species found in the neighborhood" ("Bird, Bird-watching, and Jazz" 257) certainly seems to apply to Filomeno, too. In any case, Ellison's essay "On Bird, Bird-watching and Jazz" acknowledges the difficulty in ascertaining just what kind of bird is being heard at a given moment. Ellison proposes that Charlie Parker, who is believed to have gotten his name from the yardbird (chicken), is probably a mockingbird. But then he concludes that maybe he's really "poor robin," tied to a stump and picked clean in the old blues song, "They Picked Poor Robin" (264-5). That suggestion, in turn, connects him to the tragic legends of the nightingale and therefore again to Filomeno.

But a mockingbird is not a nightingale. The two birds have different songs, different markings, and different territories. Maybe, though, that makes the comparison all the more apt, since the goal of this study has been not to imply sameness between its subjects, but to sketch out a sort of ornithology that might comprehend them.

Over the previous chapters, we have proposed a conceptual tool, the jazz matrix, that is comprehensive enough to allow us to find points of contact between James Weldon Johnson, Alejo Carpentier, and Ralph Ellison, and precise enough to generate insights into what music means, for each author, in terms of race and nation. We have used the leeway granted by this matrix to apply New World Baroque theory to Johnson and Ellison, and insights from theorists in African American Studies to Carpentier, while simultaneously seeking to ground our arguments in concrete connections between these authors and their milieus.

The resulting analysis has revealed the approach that the three authors shared regarding the incorporation of black expressions into national culture and, just as interestingly, the parallel conflicts and contradictions that that approach exposed in each

writer's worldview. Again, none of this is meant to imply sameness among these authors. Johnson, who wrote during a time when white cultural supremacy was largely unchallenged, deployed Eurocentrism strategically to advance arguments for black equality. In contrast, Carpentier remained largely unaware of his biases until the influence of James Joyce and Severo Sarduy and the development of his own New World Baroque thinking led to a much more self-conscious approach to race in *Concierto barroco*. Finally, Ellison embraced conflict and contradiction as the "warring contraries" that generated jazz and, beyond that, characterized the entire American experiment.

Ultimately, the value of an analytical tool lies in its broad applicability, and this dissertation is intended to facilitate conversations on music and fiction, on borders and migration, on cultural specificity and cultural appropriation. The necessity of such conversations is borne out by the example of a writer like Díaz, who describes his two principal registers as "this kind of crazy Caribbean language and music" and "this sort of African-American-infused American vernacular" (Barnett). Johnson, Carpentier, and Ellison represent appropriate starting points for these conversations, given the ways each inhabited the space between cultural subversion and bourgeois integrationism. In distinct but comparable ways, each articulated this tension in his writing and, to borrow the title of Ellison's 1955 essay, each framed it as living with music.

Appendix A

"Despedida a mi madre (En la capilla)," by Plácido (Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés). As printed in *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1922), edited by James Weldon Johnson.

Despedida a mi madre
(En la capilla)

Si la suerte fatal que me ha cabido,
Y el triste fin de mi sangrienta historia,
Al salir de esta vida transitoria
Deja tu corazón de muerte herido;
Baste de llanto: el ánimo afligido
Recobre su quietud; muero en la gloria,
Y mi plácida lira a tu memoria
Lanza en la tumba su postrer sonido.

Sonido dulce, melodioso y santo,
Glorioso, espiritual, puro y divino,
Inocente espontáneo como el llanto
Que vertiera al nacer: ya el cuello inclino!
Ya de religión me cubre el manto!
Adiós mi madre! adiós—El Peregrino.

Appendix B

"Farewell to My Mother (In the Chapel)," by Plácido; translated by William Cullen Bryant. As printed in *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1922), edited by James Weldon Johnson.

Farewell to My Mother
(In the Chapel)

The appointed lot has come upon me, mother,
The mournful ending of my years of strife,
This changing world I leave, and to another
In blood and terror goes my spirit's life.
But thou, grief-smitten, cease thy mortal weeping
And let thy soul her wonted peace regain;
I fall for right, and thoughts of thee are sweeping
Across my lyre to wake its dying strains.
A strain of joy and gladness, free, unfailing
All glorious and holy, pure, divine,
And innocent, unconscious as the wailing
I uttered on my birth; and I resign
Even now, my life, even now descending slowly,
Faith's mantle folds me to my slumbers holy.
Mother, farewell! God keep thee—and forever!

Appendix C

"Plácido's Farewell to His Mother (Written in the Chapel of the Hospital de Santa Cristina on the Night Before His Execution)," by Plácido; translated by James Weldon Johnson. As printed in *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1922), edited by James Weldon Johnson.

Plácido's Farewell to His Mother
(Written in the Chapel of the Hospital de Santa Cristina on the Night Before His Execution)

If the unfortunate fate engulfing me,
The ending of my history of grief,
The closing of my span of years so brief,
Mother, should wake a single pang in thee,
Weep not. No saddening thought to me devote;
I calmly go to a death that is glory-filled,
My lyre before it is forever stilled
Breathes out the thee its last and dying note.

A note scarce more than a burden-easing sigh,
Tender and sacred, innocent, sincere—
Spontaneous and instinctive as the cry
I gave at birth—and now the hour is here—
O God, thy mantle of mercy o'er my sins!
Mother, farewell! The pilgrimage begins.

Appendix D

"Blue," by Alejo Carpentier (1928). Originally published in Havana's *Diario de la Marina*, August 26, 1928.

Blue

Para Félix Pita Rodríguez

Traje mil copos,
mil copos del plantío
--rojo el sol, rojo el río…--,
los copos eran blancos
y todos se incendiaron.

Luna roja, cantar de negros
Lleva el Mississippi
lleva el Mississippi
un rezongar de letanía,
bramen sirenas en lejanías
si hay cigarras en mi lecho!
Luna roja, luna herida,
por la veleta de la capilla.

No iremos a misa
mañana, Ruby.
Te llevaré—negro astuto—
en mi barca río abajo.
Pero ¿Dios qué dirá?
--lo sabrá el reverendo!—,
el Señor y todos los santos
¿qué dirán?

Ni barca, ni amor.
Cantarás los himnos
y yo iré al cielo.
En las nubes tendré
lecho con sábanas blancas
a San Pedro pediré
una cadena de plata
y como nimbos de arcángeles brillarán
mis zapatos de charol.

Traje mil copos,
mil copos del plantío

--negra la nube, negro el río—,
los copos eran rojos
y todos se apagaron.

Appendix E

"Blue," by Alejo Carpentier (1929). Set to music by Marius-François Gaillard.

Blue

Traje mil copos, mil copos del plantío
Rojo el sol rojo el río
Los copos eran blancos y todos se incendiaron

En la capilla de tablas claras
Se detiene cada Domingo el convoy del Señor
Qué importa el olvido de lentos barcos de rueda
Si en mi techo cantan cigarras
Y sé la historia de David y de Josué
Y su trompeta
Y de Daniel y sus leones

Aunque bramen sirenas en lejanía
Seguiré cantando los himnos con el Reverendo y
Hermana Topsy
Y cuando suba al cielo tendré lecho con sábanas blancas

A San Pedro pediré una cadena de plata
Y como nimbos de ángeles brillarán
Mis zapatos de charol

Traje mil copos, mil copos del plantío
Negra la nube, negro el río
Los copos eran rojos y todos se apagaron.

Appendix F

"Biblia con blues," by Alejo Carpentier. Undated, handwritten document housed at the Fundación Alejo Carpentier in Havana.
Transcription made July 5th, 2012.

Biblia con blues
armonio[121]

Luna roja, cantar de cigarras
Hay capillas de tabla clara
y barcos de rueda por el río.
El domingo tendremos
la historia de Daniel en la fosa de los leones
y partirá el ferrocarril del Señor
en nuestra capilla de tabla clara

En la capilla de tabla clara
se detiene cada domingo
el convoy del Señor
y en mi techo cantan guitarras

¿qué importa el olvido
de los lentos barcos de rueda
y la historia de David
y de Jesu y sus trompetas
y de Daniel y sus leones?

Aunque bramen sirenas en lejanía
Seguiré cantando los himnos
con hermana blanca y hermana Topsy
Y cuando suba al cielo tendré

---

[121] Some of Carpentier's handwritten words are difficult to discern. Although it is possible that Carpentier wrote "armonía" [harmony] under the poem's title, my best guess is that he wrote "armonio," *harmonium*, referring to the small reed organ that, according to *Oxford Music Online*, was commonly used in small churches and chapels in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Montagu). Horace Clarence Boyer (2000) writes that the harmonium was "one of the earliest gospel keyboard instruments," and notes that it accompanied such famous singers as Blind Mamie Forehand and Mahalia Jackson (39, 83).

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This manuscript was typed by the author.